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THE  
DANTE SOCIETY  
LECTURES

BY

HENRY THOMAS CART.	MRS. CRAIGIE.
GEORGE DOUGLAS.	ELEANOR F. JOURDAIN.
LUIGI RICCI.	BISHOP OF RIPON.
BARON SONNINO.	EDWARD WILBERFORCE.
W. J. PAYLING WRIGHT.	

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## PREFACE

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN, POET LAUREATE.

I AM sometimes asked, “What is the object, and what the use, of a Dante Society in London?” To such a question I have invariably replied, “It is to enable English readers to become acquainted with a great poet, and so to raise the current standard of what literature and poetry are.” How little many of our countrymen and country-women know of Dante and Dante’s writings was forced on my attention recently on receiving from the editor of a paper of wide circulation and exceptional seriousness a copy of its illustrated almanac for 1903. Under its most prominent illustration were inscribed the words, “Dante’s First Meeting with Beatrice,” Beatrice being represented by a rather twentieth-century-looking young woman some eighteen years of age, though Dante himself has told us that when he first met her she was only nine.

You must have heard of the lady to whom it was remarked the other day, “You seem to take a great interest in

politics," and who replied, "I do not know that I do, but I take a very great interest in politicians." Similarly, I suspect there are a good many persons who take little or no interest in poetry, the higher poetry at least, but who feel a lively interest in poets, by reason of the belief, whether correct or the reverse I cannot say, that in the more romantic emotions poets play an exceptionally active and engaging part; and I entertain little doubt that did one question one's questioners as to what they know of Dante, one would discover that it is limited to a general idea that he was passionately in love with a Florentine girl he did not marry, and whom, when she was dead, he visited Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven in search of, and then described his experiences in a long and rather tedious poem. There are many who may know just a little more than that of Dante—of Beatrice, *La Vita Nuova*, and the *Divina Commedia*—but whom it would still benefit to join this Society, if only in order to acquire a more correct conception of what poetry is, and what is a noble and really admirable style in writing, as distinguished from a style that is jaunty, mean, vulgar, languishing, or affected. For it is idle to seek to blind ourselves to the fact that, as far as literature, and poetry more especially, are concerned, we have fallen, in Milton's phrase, on evil days. Not that—as circulating library readers and imperfectly

qualified lecturers sometimes assert, and much-occupied reviewers indolently repeat —there is no first-rate literature produced at present, but that the former do not read, and the latter do not duly examine, what little of first-rate there may be.

I can only say I have read two prose works produced during the last two years, which, if I am any judge, are very great indeed, though both have attracted, I am not in the least surprised to observe, very limited and very cursory attention. One is an historical work, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*, concerning which I took occasion to say what I think some time ago at Edinburgh. The other is a prose romance, entitled *The Valley of Decision*. I am inclined to suspect it is extremely difficult for a novel to be, at one and the same time, an interesting and well-told story—which, of course, a novel ought to be—and a literary and intellectual work of a high order. *The Valley of Decision* is both. The historical work I have named is by Mr. Samuel Dill, Professor of Greek in the University of Belfast; the novel is by Mrs. Wharton. This I learn from the title-pages of the two books, and I can tell you nothing more on that head. But, having read these two really great works with the utmost attention and enjoyment, and having observed how slight, comparatively, has been the appre-

ciation they have aroused, either in readers or reviewers, one may perhaps legitimately surmise that it is just possible other literature of a yet higher order likewise may have been published in our time of more importance than has yet been pointed out, though, meanwhile, literature, aspiring to be regarded in that light, but which is certainly not lastingly important, has received a due, I should be disposed to say an even excessive, meed of admiration.

Is it arrogant to entertain only limited deference for the opinion of those who, by the perpetual reading and admiring of inferior writings, have vitiated their taste and deadened their imagination? For this much-to-be-regretted condition of things, I can conceive no more effectual corrective than familiarity with the *Divine Comedy* of Dante; not Dante travestied and outraged; not the pitifully pathetic tale in the fifth canto of the *Inferno*, in which the pure, yet impassioned reserve of the poet makes sin appear almost saintly, transformed into theatrical performances of conventional concupiscence; not, finally, the Dante who, I am told, has been visibly represented in an English play, wherein the divine poet was transformed into an exceedingly earthly lover, notwithstanding that he himself has told us that his love for Beatrice was of so perfect a quality that it never allowed him to be overruled by love without the faithful counsel of reason; and the Beatrice

of *La Vita Nuova* and *Il Paradiso*, is represented as writhing and declaiming in purgatorial pains.

Many of you must know the story of the diplomatist who urged a young *attaché* to learn Spanish, and who, when the advice had been followed, in the hope of its leading to professional promotion, observed, "I am glad to hear it, for you will now be able to read *Don Quixote* in the original." Similarly, I would say to the persons who want to know why there is a Dante Society in London, "Learn Italian; that you may read the *Divina Commedia* in the tongue of Dante, may thereby improve your poetic taste, may acquire the capacity for reading long poems, and may provide yourselves with effectual protection against the prevailing tendencies of your time."

In the age that is passing away, painting had the ascendant among the arts, and hence poetry was valued in proportion as it contained lines and passages of what is mischievously called "word - painting." The present age, true to itself in this respect, has advanced yet one more step in the sensuousness of its preferences, and music now holds the field against arts not so generally attractive but intellectually higher. Accordingly, poetry is chiefly judged at present by a musical standard, and that a by no means high musical standard, instead of by a poetical and intellectual standard.

Finally, in reading Dante, one becomes familiar with and insensibly prepossessed in favour of a just style and appropriate diction in poetry, and learns the valuable lesson that style and diction should be simple without being mean, lofty without being turgid, may rise to tones and chords of thunder without losing harmoniousness and dignity, must occasionally be colloquial but never vulgar, fastidious but never superfine nor affected. I am aware that critics, like all agreeable people, are a rather sensitive race, more so, I think, even than poets, though that is saying a good deal; but I hope they will not take it amiss if I hint that a close study of Dante would be useful, even to them, and to their occasional comments on style and diction. Had Shakespeare lived in these days—which, unfortunately for us, though, perhaps, not altogether unfortunately for himself, he does not—and had he written—

All our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle !

I fear he would never have heard the last of that candle, and that it would have furnished endless material for the mocking merry-andrews of the period. Yet nothing could be more appropriate than its colloquial introduction into a most lofty passage, and might, as far as diction is concerned, serve for an admirable example of the “Realistic Treatment of the Ideal,” on which I once

had the pleasure of discoursing before the Dante Society.

Some day there may possibly be something more to say on that subject. But, for the present, what I have said—I hope not at too great length, and with some reluctance, in the hope it may prove helpful where help is needed—must suffice. Signor Giosuè Carducci, whom—though he has fallen under the ban of certain Italian critics since he abandoned supposed Republican for avowedly Monarchical sympathies—I trust all members of this Society regard as the first of living Italian poets, exclaims in his Preface to the *Poetical Works of Angelo Poliziano*, “Sciagurata la critica che ossasse mai vantarsi di non curare la forma” (accursed be that criticism which piques itself on caring little about form). That opinion has been held by approved judges, and acted on by approved writers, for many a generation before the present one existed ; and it will again be accepted as sound in days when people have somewhat more leisure and a more discriminating taste than they seem to command at present.

## SOME ASPECTS OF THE SYMBOLISM OF THE *DIVINA COMMEDIA*

By ELEANOR F. JOURDAIN, DR. UNIV. PARIS,  
VICE-PRINCIPAL OF ST. HUGH'S HALL,  
OXFORD; READ AT THE MEETING OF THE  
DANTE SOCIETY OF NOVEMBER 18TH, 1903.

No study of the *Divina Commedia* is complete which leaves out the discussion of the hidden meaning to which Dante draws our attention twice at least in the course of the poem.\* That such meaning, clothed in suitable imagery, should exist side by side with the greater allegories of the *Divina Commedia* is quite in the spirit of Dante's work. For does not the *Divina Commedia* belong to the Apocalyptic side of poetry? —the side, that is, which is concerned with a universal view of man, man as he exists in all conditions of space and time, and, in especial, man as he stands in the eyes of his Maker. The origin, the method, the language of the poem all bear out this view. A work of such overwhelming force and

\* *Inf.*, ix. 61; *Purg.*, viii. 19.

## 2 ASPECTS OF SYMBOLISM

insight as the *Divina Commedia* could only have been accomplished by a mind that, through faith in its own mission and by devotional union with the Infinite mind, had fitted itself to translate the vision into the symbols in which alone it could find human expression. The greatness of the poem depends upon the power of the poet to indicate a meaning to which the common experience of the race bears witness, a meaning which is enriched by personal experience, but not narrowed down to it. Dante had this faith and this power. He believed in the unity of life, the Divine government of the world, and the pre-eminence of Love in that Government.\*

The sense of mystery—a sense which is the explanation of much of the religious thought of the Middle Ages—dominates the *Divina Commedia*. Dante has a conception of two worlds, the seen and the unseen; in the *Divina Commedia* they are laid open to our view. The invisible is to him no shadow of the visible, as in the Greek stories of the underworld; nor, on the other hand, is the visible world but “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” Both are to Dante intensely real; neither is explicable without the other, the mystery lies in their relation.

Connected with this subject is the scientific and philosophic one of the relation of spirit to matter. This Dante touches

\* *Parr.*, xxxii. 86.

upon in the *Purgatorio*,\* and discusses at length in the *Paradiso*;† confusing in his explanation the philosophic and scientific conceptions of matter. But the problem which chiefly occupies Dante's thoughts and is the *raison d'être* of the poem, is that of the relation of the seen and unseen worlds conceived in the light of the relation of the spirit of man to God. The problem of the relation between matter and spirit is subordinate to that of spirits to the Spirit of God. Dante sees this relation in three aspects, he considers man in turn as subject to punishment, impelled to purification, as partaking in holiness. This threefold view, corresponding to the three divisions of the poem, must be seen in its completeness to be appreciated; and a careful comparison of the three divisions of the poem will be helpful as affording us some idea of the theological value attributed in Dante's mind to each separate idea.

It would appear that the law, the working of which he makes us observe in the three Kingdoms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, is in the first the law of inevitable retribution, the Greek Nemesis. In the second it is the law of the spiritual life, that of growth as a consequence of Divine grace and human effort. In the third it is the law of love; the Divine law as perceived in the act of forgiveness. Punishment,

\* *Purg.*, xviii. 49 ff.

† *Par.*, vii. 180 ff.; xiii. 52 ff.; xiv. 48 ff.

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Penitence, and Forgiveness might have been, in Dante's mind, alternative titles to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.

It is possible to distinguish between two kinds of Symbolism used in the *Divina Commedia*. There is, in the first place, the open and evident symbolism connected with the general idea of the poem, and secondly, the symbolism which is implied rather than expressed in its structure, and is gathered rather from the details than from the main lines. This may be described as the correspondence in detail between the three parts of the poem. Just as, however, the episodes are in close relation to the central story, so the detailed symbolism harmonizes with the larger and more allegorical symbolic forms; and there are cases where the two overlap.\*

Among the evident symbols must be placed the greater and lesser allegories of the poem. Man is shown to us as led by human wisdom, then by Divine, feeding upon the fruit of the ages, and then affected by inspiration from God. The poem is full of "Knowledge and Wisdom and Spiritual Understanding," and exhibits the mind of man in its most reverent attitude to these three stages of mental and spiritual growth. The whole allegory of the guides to the

\* As, for example, where Dante's treatment of the subject of prayer is used both to illustrate the great truth of the Atonement (marking the relation of the different spirits to God) and also to illustrate the greater and lesser lines of divisions in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise (emphasizing their likenesses and contrasts).

invisible world, perhaps the most intentionally striking and persistent part of the symbolism; the emphasis given in turn to all departments of knowledge, human and Divine, in the spheres of Paradise; the didactic habit of mind not only of the most spiritually disposed inhabitant of the invisible world, but also of the struggling and of the stained spirits, all tend to show Dante's sympathy with human life in its effort to convert the sweet and bitter of experience into knowledge that will serve the world. Still more even does he direct our attention to the effort of the individual to rise above the "blind life" by pursuing wisdom as an end in itself, and thus indirectly raising the standard of human ideals.

The allegory of the guides, and the sub-allegories which occur in connexion with it, viz., that explaining Dante's theory of Grace,\* and that explaining the contrast of the active and contemplative life,† are clearly set out in the *Divina Commedia*. The very plainness of these allegories has, however, tended to divert the minds of readers from the allegorical tendency in detail of the *Divina Commedia*, and of the immense use made of symbolism to help it

\* The Blessed Virgin and Santa Lucia, *Inf.*, ii. 52.

† Leah and Rachel, *Purg.*, xxvii. 100, Beatrice and Matilda, *Purg.*, xxviii. 22. The contrast between the active and contemplative life is emphasized just before the Spirit of Man (Dante) is led by Human Knowledge (Virgil) to seek Divine Wisdom (Beatrice).

## 6 ASPECTS OF SYMBOLISM

out. Thus the poem is not always readily seen to be a consistently symbolic whole.

The symbolic explanation, however, when universally applied, helps to bring out the sense of the inner force and unity of the poem.

So, for instance, it is useful to remember, even when making a merely historical study of the characters of the poem, that their position in the circles, terraces, or spheres, depends on the special sin of which they are for the moment to be regarded as representative. The place assigned to characters in Hell, Purgatory, or Paradise may perplex the historical sense of the critic, since in some cases it appears to contradict the general tendency of their lives ; but if the symbolic view is once fully admitted, the superficial notion of Dante's personal feeling, or slight inadequate knowledge, as primarily concerned in the arrangement of his characters, falls unregretted to the ground. Virgil in Limbo, Cato in Purgatory ; not only the position of these two characters as the guide through Hell and Purgatory, and the Warden of the latter Kingdom, but also that of every character in the poem, bears witness to the fact that Dante was considering each as a type of sin—unconscious (Limbo), unrepented of (Hell), repented of (Purgatory), and remitted (Paradise).

Even where the symbolism is obvious, as, for instance, in the fitting of the form of

torture to the sin, there is still room for the discovery of helpful symbolic analogy in the great groupings as well as in the smallest details. So in the Upper Hell the sins of the flesh are punished by natural means, wind and rain and mire. The spirits are beaten down by the unrestrained forces of nature. But in Purgatory (in which we trace many analogies with the Upper Hell) the connexion of the special type of sin with its punishment is much closer and more emphatic; apparently with the idea of inducing the spirit to see his sin in all its nakedness, its dimensions, its force. The vision of sin leads to penitence and is in turn made clearer by it. The spirit is no longer overwhelmed by unrestrained forces but stimulated to constant effort.

Again: in Hell the spirit of man is seen subjected to the action of fixed law, which governs the supernatural as well as the natural world: every sin is perceived in connexion with its consequence, direct, immediate, and unchallenged; the degenerate spirit of man is acknowledged to be tainted, and subjected to demoniacal influence. In Purgatory the attitude of penitence prepares the spirit for angelic messages and angelic helps. In Paradise angelic influence is felt, not seen: the angels are especially connected with the victorious virtue in man of which they are the type; but the faith of the blessed does not need the visible symbol of aspiration, as

## 8 ASPECTS OF SYMBOLISM

was the case in Purgatory. The "grace" of Paradise seems to consist in the persistence and perfection of human personality : in the withdrawal, to meet the demands of the fine spiritual growth of man, of adventitious aids to progress, and in his close relation to the personality of the Godhead.\* Notice how the will of man—to take for a moment the three strands of human personality and analyze them—is crippled and impotent in Hell,† employed in constant effort in Purgatory,‡ acting with absolute freedom and power in Paradise.§ Notice how the reason of man is represented in Hell as incompetent to treat the problems of human life,|| how it is encouraged to deal with them in Purgatory,¶ and finds its satisfaction in Paradise.\*\* Notice how Love is shown perverted and contradicted by the circumstances of the case in Hell,†\* how it is a necessity of progress in Purgatory,‡\* and reaches its fulfilment in Paradise.§\*

The revelation of God to the spirits of the invisible world is also symbolically expressed. Passages which recall the life of our Lord and which strike the reader at

\* *Purg.*, xxx. 13; *Par.*, vii. 115; xx. 118; xxviii. 112; xxix. 61, 65; xxxi. 50; xxxii. 42.

† *Inf.*, ix. 33.

‡ *Purg.*, xxvii. 121.

§ *Par.*, ix. 109.

|| *Inf.*, vii. 70 (*o creature sciocche*); *Inf.*, xi. 76 (*Perché tanto delira*).

¶ *Purg.*, v. 19.

\*\* *Inf.*, x. 130; *Par.*, xxviii. 106.

†\* *Inf.*, v. 100.

‡\* *Purg.*, xiv. 130.

§\* *Par.*, xxii. 31; *Purg.*, xxvi. 61; *Par.*, xxi. 94.

first sight as literary or dramatic in treatment, or as historical or theological in matter, will be seen to bear their part in the elucidation of the symbolic method. Thus the Incarnation of Christ is never mentioned in the *Inferno*. Hell is so far from the knowledge of God that the central fact of human history has no meaning to the unrepentant spirit of man. Only after the centre of gravity is passed and Dante is on his way to Purgatory do we find an allusion to the "Man who was born and died sinless."

L'Uom che nacque e visse senza pecca.\*

The passion of Christ is treated in an equally characteristic way. The "rocks" that were "rent" during His Crucifixion were, Dante thinks, foundations of the City of Dis.† The earthquake was felt down in Malebolge and broke some of the bridges there.‡ Only in Limbo did the risen Christ appear, and even then as a "Mighty One, crowned with a sign of victory."

Un Possente  
Con segno di vittoria coronato.§

The *Purgatorio* enshrines all the story of our Lord's Ministry, which, however, is not mentioned in the *Paradiso*; though the Incarnation and the Passion are frequently alluded to there. The relation of Christ to

\* *Inf.*, xxxiv. 116.

† *Inf.*, xiii. 31.

‡ *Inf.*, xxi. 106; cf. *Par.*, vii. 48; *Inf.*, xxiii. 138.

§ *Inf.*, iv. 52.

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the other persons of the Holy Trinity ; the faith in His nature as Human and Divine ; are also treated in the pages of the *Paradiso*, while the latter subject had only been treated allegorically in Purgatory by the introduction of the symbol of the Griffin as the central fact in the pageant shown in the Terrestrial Paradise.\*

Thus, to sum up, the Passion of Christ is felt in Hell as a physical shock, in Purgatory as the completion of a series of historical facts, in Paradise as the fruit of the central fact of living importance to Christianity, the Incarnation ; and as continued and perfected in the work of the Holy Spirit.

The symbolic treatment is just as clear in what may be called the literary setting of the poem. Take, for instance, the geographical and astronomical details ; the time and place references. The fitness of the allusions to the scientific knowledge of Dante's day is a matter of great interest to the specialist inquirer, but in themselves they might be supposed to check or embarrass the ordinary student. They would, perhaps, do so but for the great idea that underlies them. Practically, it does not matter to us where the sun was, nor in which direction Dante walked, until the reiteration of these details brings home to us the fact that the pilgrimage lasted from Holy Thursday through Good Friday and

\* *Purg.* xxi. xxxii.

Easter Sunday till the Thursday in Easter week ; and that it is in truth the history of the Passion and the Resurrection of the human soul.

Another significant use of symbolism is found in the warnings, the examples, and the images of aspiration that are connected with the literary setting of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. For example, in Hell pagan mythology supplies the scenery of the drama ; but while in Greek and Latin literature the darkness of the air and the character of the rivers of the underworld represented in their horror and deadness the separation of the spirits from the daylight life, in the *Inferno* the rivers represent the repulsive character of different forms of sins, and the darkness implies removal from holiness. So also the inhabitants of the pagan underworld reappear as guardians of special realms of sin. They no longer rule supreme ; Pluto, Cerberus, the Minotaur, Geryon, the Harpies, the words in the *Divina Commedia* suggest monstrous emblems of guilt—types of varieties of sin such as avarice, gluttony, wrath, fraud, violence. The whole world of pagan literature is thus subordinated to the Christian idea and relegated to Hell to serve as a warning to the Christian poet in his pilgrimage.

In Purgatory the spirits are confronted with types of the virtues in which they have failed and are striving to perfect themselves. Each guardian angel of the terraces in

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Purgatory strikes on the senses in some way, whether it is light or fragrance or the stir of the long white wings, or the sound of the living voice, which calls to mind the existence of an ideal and is an example and a help to the penitent spirit. In Paradise it is the spirit of humanity, rising above itself, that supplies the ideal for the aspiration of that kingdom. The enthusiasm of the newly-cleansed spirit shines in the very virtue it lost on earth and regained by the spiritual effort of Purgatory.

Besides the open and evident symbolism to which fragmentary allusion has just been made, there is an implied symbolism, not less inherent in the structure of the poem, the perception of which repays close study, and which it is proposed in the present paper to treat in greater detail.

This implied symbolism is never forced, and seems, in fact, to grow naturally out of the habit of mind of a writer whose thoughts were constantly fixed on ideas too fleeting, too many-sided, too true for literal expression. The subjects which have brought this method into play are briefly :—

*A.* The relation of the visible to the invisible world.

The key to the thoughts suggested by this is given by the presence of spirits of living men among the shades.

*B.* The relation to one another of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.

A careful comparison of the three parts

of the poem reveals the different treatment under differing conditions of subjects connected with the spiritual life of man.

*C.* The relation of the three kingdoms to the Godhead.

This is implied in the perception of God by all the actors in the drama, and emphasized by their special use of the name of God.

*A.* The relation of the visible to the invisible worlds in Dante's view can chiefly be gathered from the words of the *Divina Commedia* by a study of three questions :—

- (a) What is the effect upon the invisible world of the entrance of Dante among the shades ?
- (b) What is the effect upon the poet himself of his environment in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise ?
- (c) What is the meaning of the introduction into the *Divina Commedia* of characters who were alive at the supposed date of the poem ?

(a) The entrance of Dante into the invisible world causes from the first moment a strong sensation there. The guardians of the circles are moved to anger at the intrusion of a living man into their kingdom ; the demons are actively opposed to it. Only the strongest possible motive can explain an arbitrary entrance into the court of the Divine mysteries. It is felt in the

invisible world to be as unnatural as the intrusion of a bodiless spirit into the visible world. We can even trace in Purgatory a certain unquiet and distrust caused by the knowledge that Dante has reached that kingdom by way of Hell.

The "complete experience" of which Virgil speaks is foreign to the spirits' knowledge of life : as those in Hell distrust one who still possesses the favour of God, so the spirits in Purgatory shun one who has the knowledge of unrepented sin. Cato expresses this feeling—

Son le leggi d'abisso così rotte?  
O è mutato in Ciel nuovo consiglio,  
Che dannati venite alle mie grotte?\*—

which, however, is shared by the spirits under his care, who grow pale with wonder or huddle together and gaze at the approach of Dante.+

No opportunity is lost of marking this contrast between the living man and the shades. This is most strongly emphasized in Purgatory, where otherwise, owing to the greater likeness between the conditions of that kingdom and the earth, the contrast needs to be insisted upon if it is to be kept before the mind of the reader.

Dante's entrance, which was unwelcome in the Lower Hell, and caused a thrill of surprise in Purgatory, is accepted with loving eagerness in Paradise.

Ecco chi crescerà li nostri amori.

\* *Purg.*, i. 46.

+ *Purg.*, ii. 67; iii. 67; v. 7.

It is noticeable that, though repulsed at the entrance to Hell, Dante is apparently not unwelcome in the circles of the Upper Hell. The advent of Dante brings about a momentary contact between the spirit of the living man and the spirit in Hell, and what is the result? In the Upper Hell there is for the time a cessation of suffering.\* The wind drops while Francesca tells her story, Filippo Argenti has his head above the mire, Ciacco sits up to address the travellers and only falls down again and becomes blind as they pass, while all the spirits take the initiative in addressing Dante. The apparent exception is that of the avaricious and prodigal who come without ceasing to the "eternal shock," but the fact only strengthens the above argument, for in their case no word passes between the sinners and Dante. Virgil, actuated perhaps by a great disdain shown throughout the poem for the sins of avarice and luxury, explains that recognition of the spirits who had given way to them would be impossible. Both in the Upper and the Lower Hells the spirits realise their sin as Dante passes, and are willing to explain it and act as a warning to despairing humanity,† just as in Purgatory the spirits are an example to struggling humanity and in Paradise the ideal for aspiring humanity.

\* Not so in the Lower Hell, though on one occasion the surprise of the spirits makes them forget their torture.  
*Inf.*, xxviii. 32.

† *Inf.*, xxxiii. 136; xxviii. 94.

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As the evil deepens, however, the spirits in the circle of the traitors expose one another's sin.

After the "great day" the solidarity of the human race, a fact which is still felt in the Upper Hell, will according to Dante be dissolved. It seems evident that Dante imagines life as continuing in the Upper Hell with increase of suffering. In the Lower Hell the spirits are conscious both of the irreparable harm they have done and also of the coming deprivation they will have to undergo.

Però comprender puoi, che tutta morta  
Fia nostra conoscenza de quel punto  
Che del futuro fia chiusa la porta.\*

(i) The effect of the invisible world on Dante, the representative of the spirit of man, is very remarkable. Here the symbolic theory explains passages which might otherwise prove a difficulty : e.g., Dante's feeling of revulsion against Filippo Argenti for which he was commended by Virgil in the Upper Hell,† and the deception he practised on Frate Alberigo in Cocytus.‡ Dante consistently reflects his environment and shows his resentment at the guilt he sees around him by treating the spirit in a manner that recalls the natural consequence of the particular crime punished in that part of Hell. It strengthens the above argument to remember that even the

\* *Inf.*, x. 106 (Farinata); cf. *Par.*, xv. 10.

† *Inf.*, viii. 52.      ‡ *Inf.*, xiii. 148.

physical conditions of Hell affect Dante as he passes through the different circles. So, to give one example from Cocytus, Dante, who has been treacherous to Frate Alberigo, feels the grip of the cold there, and speaks of himself as frozen and weak.\*

Examples might be multiplied: Dante mutilates the suicide,† is told by Virgil to call upon Fransesa in the name of Love,‡ the Malebranche are "befooled."§

In the third pit of Malebolge the same idea is carried out in detail, and the reader is encouraged to seek for the symbolic meaning of Dante's tears among the weeping diviners.

Se Dio ti lasci, Lettor, prender frutto  
Di tua lezione, or pensa per te stesso  
Com' io potea tener lo viso asciutto.||

In Purgatory, too, Dante takes the physical as well as the mental attitude of spirits.¶ His courage fails before the entrance, he climbs with the same effort, receives the marks of sin on his forehead, bends with the humble, loses consciousness in the thick smoke, and rivals the spirits in the later circles in his eagerness to pace quickly along the paths of penitence.\*\* If he falls behind, the fact is explained as due to reverence, not want of speed.

\* *Inf.*, xxxiii. 100.

† *Inf.*, xiii. 31.

‡ *Inf.*, v. 76.

§ *Inf.*, xxiii. 13.

¶ *Inf.*, xx. 19; cf. *Purg.*, v. 10, where Dante is rebuked for staying to gaze at the spirits there.

¶ *Purg.*, xiii. 133, ff. xxxvii. 49. He submits most evidently to the punishments for pride, anger, and lust.

\*\* *Purg.*, xxiii. 7.

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O tu, che vai, non per esser piu tardo,  
Ma forse reverente, agli altri dopo.....\*

In Paradise, Dante, affected by his new surroundings, oversteps, like the spirits, his natural powers. This explains his dissertations on Faith, Hope, and Love, commended respectively by St. Peter, St. James, and St. John;† and the power he shows of entering, beyond human possibilities, into the joy of the higher spheres.

Just as, up to the Great Day, the solidarity of the human race is exemplified in the passing of the spirit of the poet through the kingdoms of the unseen world, so the effect of the unseen world on the seen is shown to be equally significant to the race of man. The presence of evil in the unseen world is a real menace to the pilgrim soul on earth ; the sense of spiritual effort and spiritual bliss in the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant are a reflection of the ideally Christian life on earth and a foretaste of the Communion of Saints.

(c) What can be gathered as to Dante's view of the relation of the seen to the unseen world by an examination of those characters introduced into the *Divina Commedia* who were alive at the date marked out for the action of the poem? It is clear that Dante intends to teach that the visible and invisible worlds are to be considered in the closest relation to one

\* *Purg.*, xxvi. 18.      † *Par.*, xxiv. 34.

another. The first is not antecedent to the second. In the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* (not, however, the *Paradiso*\*), there are references to characters living on earth, whose spiritual state is a mystery to themselves and to their friends. Death is a revelation of a state which is conceived of as already reached, it may be unconsciously, in this world. So the human spirit builds up by its every action its Hell, or its Purgatory and its Paradise. The tortured, the mutilated, the benumbed spirit in Hell is an emblem of the suffering, the contraction, the deadening, which the personality of man suffers as the result of sin. Familiar examples are to be found in the *Inferno*: the mangling of the spirit of Mahomet and the others who roused dissensions in the world,† the torture of the traitor (Branca d'Oria), whose body was still alive on earth,‡ the control of the passive body of another traitor (Frate Alberigo), by the demon which had taken the place of the sinful spirit.§ Even the struggle in the human mind to choose the good, its eventual failure or success, is reproduced in the unseen world, and symbolized by a struggle between the demons and the angels for the spirit of the man who is passing from the visible world to the invisible. This is

\* Dante as a Churchman would be unable to dogmatize as to the placing of a living man in Paradise.

† *Inf.*, xxvii. 183.

; *Inf.*, xxxiii. 136.

‡ *Inf.*, xxxiii. 129.

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referred to once in the *Inferno* and once in the *Purgatorio*.\*

*B.* The relation of Hell, Purgatory, Paradise to one another.

The implied symbolism involved in the relation of the three Kingdoms to one another is discovered by a careful comparison of the three parts of the *Divina Commedia*.

To take first of all the material conditions involved. The actual entrance into the different circles of Hell is accompanied by sighs of agony, laments, cries of despair: into Purgatory by the chanting of Psalms. Dante himself draws our attention to this distinction.†

In Paradise, though the voiceless "sweet symphony" is heard at the moments of mounting from one division to another, the music is stilled to a diviner silence in the Heaven of Saturn, recalling the "silence in Heaven" of the Apocalypse.‡

Once in Hell, the spirit is condemned to remain in the circle to which Minos has appointed it.§ The attempt to escape or slip out of the full horror and pain brought by sin is punished by greater pain. In fact cowardice has not only made Hell—since the sinners in Hell are those who preferred sin to deprivation and pain—it also makes Hell more hellish still. So the Centaurs

\* *Inf.*, xxvii. 112; *Purg.*, v. 100.

† *Purg.*, xii. 112; also *Inf.*, iii. 23.

‡ *Par.*, xxi. 55. § *Inf.*, xiii. 94.

shoot at the shades who try to escape from the river of blood. So Brunetto Latini, who may fall out of line to join Dante, may not halt for fear of losing even the power to fan himself when in the flames. Only the spirits in Limbo—Virgil himself the most notable example—are an exception to the rule.\*

In Purgatory it is a necessity of the case that the spirits should feel the power of progress and should move upwards from terrace to terrace of the kingdom. The impulse they feel is, however, at first weak : for instance, Belacqua, in Ante-Purgatory, has none of the ready eagerness of the spirits who have passed through some of the stages of their purification. As the spirit moves upward the impulse gradually strengthens. Virgil explains this to Dante in Ante-Purgatory.†

In the *Paradiso* we are expressly told that all the spheres have an equally strong relation with God.‡ It is implied that movement is permitted and enjoined ; the three highest heavens are places of assembly for human spirits, angels, and the saints, who illustrate the individual life in the lower spheres, and the community life in the upper.

Another distinction is that of time. In Hell there is no conception of present time, passing events are unknown. The future is

\* *Inf.*, ix. 16.

† *Purg.*, iv. 88; vii. 40.  
‡ *Par.*, iv. 28; iii. 88.

dimly known.\* In Purgatory, Penitence and Hope make both the present and the future vivid. The gift of the present is one of the marks of this kingdom, and without it free-will and penitence would not be possible. The spirits see the consequences of their earthly actions and willingly drink their cup of sorrow. Nino,† Guida del Duca,‡ Marco Lombardo,§ the Abbot of San Zeno at Verona,|| Adrian V.,¶ Forese,\*\* all know the way in which history is being made in Italy: while the intense value set on time by the shades shows how clearly they realize this divine gift in Purgatory.

Tu ti rimani omai, che il tempo è caro  
In questo regno sì ch'io perdo troppo  
Venendo teco sì a paro a paro.†\*

Ditene dove la montagna giace,  
Sì che possibil sia l'andare in suso;  
Chè il perder tempo a chi più sa, più spiacere.‡\*

In Paradise the past is blotted out except as regards the true life of man shown in his practice of good. This is symbolized in the Waters of Eunoe.§\*

Connected closely with the conception of time in the three kingdoms is the manner in which Dante passes from one part of them to another. The descent is accompanied in Hell by loss of consciousness—obliteration, as we have seen, of present

\* *Inf.*, x. 100.

† *Purg.*, viii. 67.

‡ *Purg.*, xiv. 121.

§ *Purg.*, xvi. 121.

|| *Purg.*, xviii. 121.

¶ *Purg.*, xix. 142.

\*\* *Purg.*, xxiii. 85.

†\* *Purg.*, xxiv. 91.

†\* *Purg.*, iii. 76.

‡\* *Purg.*, xxxi. 94; xxxiii. 142.

time. Even before reaching Limbo, Dante falls, as overtaken with heavy sleep.\* In passing from the second to the third circle he faints.† Fear marks the descent to the City of Dis, a great stench confuses the entrance to the abodes of violence, a trembling and a great dread occur before he comes to Malebolge,‡ and the utmost fear, that of death, before he reaches the circle of the traitors—all strong sensations that obscure the sense of time.

In Purgatory the great transitions are effected during Dante's dreams, which are prophetic and involve consciousness both of the present and of the future.§

In Paradise the transition from sphere to sphere is made by Dante himself with a consciousness so vivid and acute of present time, that his mind never springs back to what is past. His movement is compared to lightning; he is drawn by Beatrice's eyes and her smile; like St. Paul he is unaware whether he is in the body or out of the body.||

Dante apparently conceives of Hell as the startling embodiment in all their force of sins which, owing to controlling circumstances, perhaps never fully develop their consequences on earth. Thus in his Hell men seem to cause one another a greater injury than was practicable in the earthly

\* *Inf.*, iii. 136.

† *Inf.*, v. 139.

‡ *Inf.*, xvii. 19; see also xxv. 145.

§ See Butler, *Purgatorio*, Appendix A., *Purg.*, ix. xix. xxvii.

See *Dante's Ten Heavens*, Edmund Gardner.

history of the characters. So in the circle of the suicides, Jacomo of St. Andrea injures the bush where is imprisoned the soul of the nameless suicide who made a gibbet for himself of his own house,\* and is reproved for the peculiarly uncalled for and unnecessary act. Then in Antenora, Ugolino, who had been betrayed by too great confidence, shows in Hell the hatred to which he never gave open expression on earth.†

In Purgatory those who had been enemies on earth support one another; this occurs in the circle of the envious as a piece of appropriate symbolism,‡ but all through this division of the *Divina Commedia* the spirits show a capacity that was unknown in Hell for working together and gaining fellowship in suffering. So the chorus singing the "Agnus Dei" symbolizes union of spirit,§ and when a spirit is moved by a "better will" to ascend to the next terrace, the whole mountain trembles with joy.||

In Paradise each individual gains from the gain of the whole. Virgil explains this to Dante in Purgatory.¶

The activity of the spirit in prayer still further illustrates these points and marks the sub-divisions of the kingdoms more clearly still. In the Upper Hell Francesca da Rimini would pray if her prayers could

\* *Inf.*, xiii. 133.

† *Inf.*, xxxiii. 124.

‡ *Purg.*, xiii. 58.

§ *Purg.*, xvi. 16.

|| *Purg.*, xxi. 67.

¶ *Purg.*, xv. 52.

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be heard.\* Below the City of Dis the impulse, which breaks out in the case of Vanni Fucci, is to blaspheme.† In Ante-Purgatory the spirits pray for the help of others' prayers.‡ In Purgatory itself they invoke Dante's prayers and those of the Saints,§ and their prayers are both for themselves and for others.|| In the *Paradiso* prayer, though not the necessary form of the activity of the spirit (praise and thanksgiving being its natural expression) is exercised for those who have gone astray in this world,¶ and for the whole body of the Church.

### C. The relations of Hell, Purgatory, Paradise to the Godhead.\*\*

The three Kingdoms represent, as we have seen, the three possible states which are the result of sin unrepented of, repented of and remitted. They thus sum up the life of man. Each Kingdom is under the special guardianship of a Person of the Holy Trinity; and the use of the name of God by the characters in the poem leads us to understand that the three Persons are manifested to them as Power, Wisdom, and Love. The whole relation of God to man is implied in the term *Giustizia Divina*, which represents the relative side of perfect

\* *Inf.*, v. 91.

† *Inf.*, xxv. 1; xxxiii. 85.

‡ *Purg.*, vi. 26.

§ *Purg.*, xiii. 106.

|| *Purg.*, xi. 31.

¶ *Par.*, xviii. 124.

\*\* This section has been reproduced in a compressed form from *A Study in the Symbolism of the Divina Commedia*, now out of print.

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Holiness. The idea of God as the Absolute Good, independently of His relation to man is only touched upon in the *Inferno*, of the three divisions of the poem.\*

God, then, is apprehended by the spirits in Hell as Power. He is *Virtù Divina*,† *il nimica Podesta*,‡ *il sommo Duce*,§ *il Re dell' Universo*.|| To the demons He is the force that controls them. The use of the name of God is evidently forbidden in Hell; neither demons nor spirits employ the word; it is mentioned once in blasphemous defiance by Vanni Fucci.¶ Even Virgil and Dante avoid the word in the presence of the spirits. They make use of a periphrasis, as do the spirits themselves, God is *Altri*,\*\* *Tal*,†\* *Colui*.‡\* Beatrice, as sharing in the Divine attributes, is referred to in the same way.§\* But Virgil and Dante, when not in the presence of the sinful spirits, speak of God by name and refer to Him as *Giustizia*.||\* Yet even they only mention Christ twice, and then not by name, but as a Mighty Power.¶\*

The use of the name of Christ is denied until Purgatory is reached.\*† There the name of God is freely employed by the repentant spirits: He is conceived of chiefly as Wisdom; *il beato Concilio*,\*‡ *la verace*

\* *Pas.*, x. 3; i. 107.

† *Inf.*, v. 36.

‡ *Inf.*, vi. 96.

§ *Inf.*, x. 102.

|| *Inf.*, v. 91.

¶ *Inf.*, xxv. 3.

\*\* *Inf.*, v. 81; xxvi. 141.

†† *Inf.*, viii. 105.

†† *Inf.*, xii. 38.

‡‡ *Inf.*, xii. 38.

¶¶ *E.g.*, vii. 19; xxix. 56.

¶¶ *Inf.*, iv. 53; xii. 38.

¶¶ *Purg.*, xxi. 8.

\*† *Purg.*, xxi. 16, 17.

*Corte,\* l'eterno Consiglio,†* are the expressions which are constantly found in the *Purgatorio*, and suggest this idea. The will of God no longer appears to man as merely coercive; it is "righteous and just" in the view of the repentant spirits.‡ The idea of power as connected with God gradually vanishes in Purgatory; the only words that recall it are used by Virgil, who has passed through Hell;§ just as, with equally accurate care in detail, the words most clearly suggesting the full conception of God—*Il Sommo Bene*||—are used only by Beatrice and Matilda, who belong to Paradise. Only the Guides use the comprehensive term *Giustizia Divina*.¶ Since Purgatory is the forecourt of Paradise, the difference in the use of the name of God in these two Kingdoms is much less marked than that between Hell and Purgatory.\*\* Paradise is under the special guardianship of the Holy Spirit; and as the vision of God in Paradise nears its perfection, there are frequent allusions made to God the Son,†\* and God the Holy Spirit,‡\* and to the dogma of the Trinity.§\* God as Love—a Love implying Wisdom and Power—is present to the minds of the spirits. God as Power alone is only conceived of by Dante, who

\* *Purg.*, xxi. 17.† *Purg.*, xxiii. 61.† *Purg.*, ii. 97; viii. 66.§ *Purg.*, iii. 32|| *Purg.*, xxviii. 91.¶ *Purg.*, xxi. 65; xxxiii. 71.\*\* *E.g.*, *Par.*, xxiii. 72; xxvii. 24.†\* *Purg.*, xxvi. 58.‡\* *Par.*, xiv. 28; xxvii. 1.§\* *Par.*, xx. 38.

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has passed through Hell. The will of God is coincident with the peace of the human spirit.

Thus Dante's practice, even as to the smallest detail of expression, bears out the theory stated as to the relation of the invisible world to each Person of the Trinity.

From an examination into Dante's use of the symbolic method, both evident and implied, we obtain help in understanding his views on the Divine government of the world. There are, however, cases where the symbolism is inadequate to the strain put upon it, and from the exceptions thus made to the harmony of the poem we gain an impression of Dante's mind at the moments when his hand failed to translate his vision into adequate words.\*

Not only the general success, but the occasional inadequacy of the symbolic method has therefore its interest to the student of Dante. The real consistency of Dante's art is made clear by the symbolism, the real inconsistency occurs when the weight of suggestiveness breaks down the harmony of the poem.

It has been urged by Dante's detractors that not only are the images called up by his method irreconcileable—this objection has now been answered†—but also that the

\* *Par.*, xiii. 76.

† As where there is apparent want of harmony in the images, there is none in the idea symbolized by them.

realistic touches in his work jar occasionally with the exalted subject of the poem. Take for instance\* the homely similes he uses. The spirit enwrapped in glory like the silk-worm in the cocoon is a very familiar example of what has proved a stumbling-block to the literary taste of some readers.† But the justification of Dante's method lies in the very fact that his subject is so exalted that homely similes can be used without fear of confusion. Just because the whole centre of the action is remote from the daily life of man, because, in fact, the pivot of the *Divina Commedia* is in the unseen world, Dante can use the most common symbols as illustrations of his ideas.

Milton, the pivot of whose *Paradise Lost* was on earth, was obliged to seek grandeur in language which, compared to Dante's, is pomp and vagueness personified. In the *Divina Commedia*, on the contrary, the suggestion of grandeur is implicit. The various pictures, with all their detail and all their homeliness, call up something hardly concrete, yet to which all the pictures have contributed their part—a sense of the mystery and yet nearness of the invisible world; an intimate thrill which is now a shudder and now an ecstasy.

Again Dante, who was critic as well as

\* *Par.*, xiv. 104.

† Charles Martel. *Par.*, viii. 52; cf. also St. Thomas as a candle in a candlestick: *Par.*, xi. 15; Cacciaguida as a coal in the flame: *Par.*, xvi. 91; Adam as an animal wriggling under a cloth: *Par.*, xxvi. 96.

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poet, analytic as well as constructive, has realized that parts of his poem would be liable, on account of their realism, to be regarded as of lower moral value to the rest, and so Virgil, representing Wisdom, is made to rebuke Dante as the spirit of man, the moment that the horrors of Hell fascinate his attention. As long as he is shocked and repugnant he is allowed to look on ; but the morbid pleasure in the sight of evil is immediately and severely dealt with. This happens, for example, when Dante stays to listen to the quarrel of the moneyers.\* Even in Purgatory he may only watch the spirits for a short time : as soon as the lesson is learnt the poet must move upwards.†

Thus the poem can be said to be greater than its apparent ethical content: it purifies and inspires in a way that the spirit of man most closely admits.

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to put the three divisions of the *Divina Commedia* together and to read them side by side, observing their likenesses and contrasts, and referring them to the symbolic method employed. But if, e.g., it is true that the three kingdoms of the unseen world represent the personal action of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, it is equally true that they represent the progressive conception in the mind of man of the whole personality of the Godhead : that

\* *Inf.*, xxx. 130.

† *Purg.*, v. 10.

Purgatory includes and surmounts the idea of Hell, and that Paradise presupposes the existence of both Hell and Purgatory. The three kingdoms are seen in relation to the spirit of man in the exercise of free will, which Dante treats as a divinely implanted germ, becoming gradually stronger under Christian influence and more able to fulfil its real mission of choosing the good.

Thus—to recapitulate—if the *Divina Commedia* represents God manifested in Three Persons to man, it also shows us the development of man to a complete personal ideal in his gradual apperception of the Godhead.

To those who realize the power of this intimate link between the ideal life and that of humanity in general, the *Divina Commedia* of Dante must always afford the sympathy that comes from comprehension, the relief that comes from artistic expression, and the courage that is gained from the view of another's fortitude.

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NOTE.—It is interesting to know that Miss ELEANOR F. JOURDAIN, the gifted authoress of the above Lecture and a Member of the Council of the Dante Society, has obtained the degree of Docteur de l'Université de France in recognition of the merit of the above Lecture.

## LANDSCAPE IN THE DIVINE COMEDY

BY SIR GEORGE DOUGLAS, BART.; READ BEFORE  
THE DANTE SOCIETY AT THE MEETING OF  
MAY 8TH, 1901. ALFRED AUSTIN, POET  
LAUREATE, IN THE CHAIR.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Our Society has recognized the almost infinite number of standpoints from which the great Italian poet whom we propose to study for an hour may be approached. Well, perhaps those standpoints may be roughly divided into three classes: scholastic, ethical, æsthetic. It is from one of the last—from an æsthetic standpoint—that I propose to-night to regard the *Divine Comedy*, studying it with a view to detaching, or throwing into relief, the *landscape* of the poem. Afterwards, we may proceed to glance at some special characteristics of the Dantesque landscape; and to inquire into the contribution in that kind made by Dante to the development of poetry generally. You will realize, I hope, that I aspire to touch only a minute part of a great whole.

I think I may take it for granted, ladies and gentlemen, that nobody can have read in the Comedy, in however cursory a manner, without being impressed by this fact—that, among the great qualities, ethical and æsthetic, moral or technical, which distinguish the author and his work, what we call “poetic vision” holds a very conspicuous place. We feel, as we read, that the poet himself sees what he describes, and he makes us see it too. Well, let us, first, if you please, take this power of poetic vision in its simplest manifestation, as applied to a single object in nature. We shall see at once that the poet was a close observer of such objects, a faithful delineator of them. I daresay a crowd of instances in point are already present to your minds. From that crowd let us separate two or three, choosing our first examples from the sombre imagery of The Hell.

You remember, then, that dismal image of the cranes, who, as they wing their flight across the sky, stretched out in long alignment, give utterance to their lamentable cry. Or, again, that piteous image of the cloud of starlings, swept in confusion on the wintry blast. Or, yet again, that sad image of the autumn leaves falling, one after one, until the bough is bared. All these things are direct from nature, and mark, too, how near akin, how apt in character of gloom, of piteousness, of melancholy, to the murky realms wherein the poet places them. He

wishes to introduce a tender passage or motive in his chant—the deathless episode of Francesca; straightway a tenderer, a more beauteous image rises upon his mind—the image of those homing doves, who,

On wide wings  
And firm to their dear nest returning,  
Cleave the air.

But passing over the exquisite art with which these images, and such as these, are selected and introduced, what I ask to draw your attention to is this : that all these things are, primarily and emphatically, *things seen*.

Passing on now to The Purgatory, the poet, issuing forth from fetid fumes and pitchy night, has looked upon the stars once more, the stars now near to their extinction by the dawn—and we have the image of release, enfranchisement, in the oft-cited line :

Conobbi il tremolar della marina.

I recognized the shimmering of the sea.

Does it not strike upon the eye with a sense of relief ; and on the ear or heart with something of the accent of that historic cry of the Ten Thousand Greeks, Θάλαττα, the accent of hope realized at last ?

But I must not loiter in the gateway of my subject. The Paradise, as was to be expected, yields us imagery of a fairer, more celestial, character—the beautiful image of the double rainbow, for instance,

—two arches, “parallel and trick’d alike,” which bridge the tenuous rain-cloud. Then, the image of the shooting star, that “sudden trail of fire,” sprung none knows whence and vanished none knows whither, which draws to itself the gaze of watchers in the night. Lastly, the image of that first uncertain peering of the stars through the twilight of eventide: Lastly, I say, because these few examples of Dante’s poetic vision, applied to single natural objects or incidents, are for our present purpose enough. Had it been otherwise, nothing could possibly have been easier than to multiply them. There are, for instance, images of a sunbeam striking on clear water, of a sunbeam penetrating shadow, of the sun itself penetrating fog. Or, for subtlety of vision, there is the likening of the gradual fading of a phantom to the sinking of a heavy substance in deep water; or, again, in speaking of the wake of a ship under sail, the noting of the “furrow” that “on either side equal returns.” All these are examples of things clearly, penetratingly beheld by the poet, and by him as clearly communicated to the reader. You remember, perhaps, that the De Goncourt brothers, those most interesting writers, in speaking of this art of presentation in literature, used the strong expression that the nineteenth century had been operated on for cataract, implying, of course, that prior to that era, the eyes of literary men

had been to all intents and purposes sealed. But the De Goncourts, with their customary impatience of classic authors, had obviously forgotten Dante !

The title, however, which I have ventured to give to this little paper of mine is *landscape* in the *Divine Comedy*. Now, by landscape in poetry we understand, I think, something more than the mere introduction of a single natural object or incident as an accessory in a poetic scene. We imply, possibly, a complete background to such a scene ; certainly, I think, something of co-ordination or grouping of such natural objects—in fact, what in the arts of design is known as composition. And the aim and intention—the *rationale*—of this kind of composition is, as I understand it, so to combine separate objects that each shall contribute to a general pre-determined effect—that each, in its new relation, shall discharge a higher function of beauty, or of significance, than in its former or isolated state. Now it is, I think, in this art of landscape-composition that Dante specially excels—that he has made his distinctive contribution to the art of literary landscape.

Let me try to illustrate what I mean.

But, before so doing, give me leave to say just one word on what I conceive to be the limits of the sphere which can legitimately be filled by landscape in any form of creative literature, whether poetry or prose. Those limits are, I believe, suffi-

ciently clearly and naturally defined. In no form of creative literature, then, can landscape ever properly fill a more important place than that of accessory or background. And the moment the landscape becomes the important consideration, or even a consideration in itself, apart from the characters or figures, at that moment do the palette and the pencil become the proper instruments of expression! It is a little astonishing that a rule as obvious as it is undeniable should be so frequently transgressed. Our modern fiction, French even more than English, abounds in examples of such transgression—irrelevant atmospheric effects, untimely sunsets, descriptions of what calls for no describing.

Perhaps the most notable example—the *locus classicus*, so to speak—of the abuse, is in the writing of a certain novelist, whose name shall remain undivulged, where to the wearied reader the sun seems sometimes to have risen and gone down at least twice in the twenty-four hours! Pray pardon the digression!

So much, then, for word-painting, or description for its own sake; so much for the abuse of landscape in literature. But within its proper sphere, and that sphere is by no means small, landscape is competent to form one of the most effective, most beautiful adjuncts of poetry. And—to return to our mountain, after this little

excursion on low levels—I question if there exists in the whole range of literature a more admirable example of the just use of it than is found in the Comedy of Dante. The *locale* of the drama is always clearly defined, but always with that fine reserve and economy of means which consistently characterize this poet, whilst the landscape is not merely duly subordinated and held in subjection, but is made in every case to minister to and to heighten the main interest of the poem.

Well, having this in mind, let us now proceed to glance at a few specimens of Dante's landscape, a few examples of the scenes he puts before us as backgrounds or adjuncts to the human or superhuman figures of his creation. We know that, besides being a keen observer, the poet was a traveller. Now with all his powerful imagination, he united a very strong vein of realism, and so there seems every probability that—just as he painted single natural objects from the life—so most of his landscape-compositions were suggested by actual scenes he had visited. The late Dean Plumptre, in those valuable notes of his, worked out this idea ingeniously, if at times, perhaps, a little fancifully. But, fascinating as that line of inquiry is, it lies somewhat beside our present mark.

Turning, then, once more to the *Inferno*, we find that here the backgrounds or surroundings sometimes partake rather of

the nature of scenery than of landscape in the strict sense of the word. Such is the case in the grandiose delineation of that City of Dreadful Night, the City of Dis, with its far-seen lurid minarets, its cresset-lighted barbican, its concentric fosses, and relentless walls framed as of iron. The suggestion, or root idea, as the Dean points out, is from a mediæval fortress (perhaps the Castle of Ferrara, Parisina's prison, may occur to some of my hearers). But how the germinal conception swells before the action of the poet's imagination ! How its inherent grimness is expanded to the height of the sinister and terrific !

In the presentment of the Stygian lake we find what may be more strictly classed as landscape. At the foot of grey and withered cliffs the inky river spreads itself abroad ; and to the surface of the lake thus formed, bubbles for ever rise from an ill source beneath. This is pure picture, nor has its weird, imaginative suggestiveness carried it outside the realm of Nature.

As the poet makes his way to the Seventh Circle of his Hell, you will recall his comparison of the precipice which he is obliged to pass to an actual place (which, with characteristic precision, he locates "di quà da Trento," on the Adice), where there had been a landslip. The downward path, where the stones often start beneath the tread, leads first to a gloomy vale ; then onward to a matted, pathless forest,

whose gnarled trees bear leaves, not green, but dark in colour as with blight, and for fruit poisonous thorns ; and then on to a herbless desert plain, which the dark forest cinctures, and whereon a shower of flames, like snowflakes upon Alpine heights, is for ever falling. Is not all this the triumph and perfection of imaginative suggestion ? And yet, if we omit the few supernatural accessories—the fiery hail, the crimson river, the harpies perched upon the boughs—we shall find that the residue is pure natural landscape. The unknown, unseen of mortal eye, is shadowed forth through the medium of the known and seen. This whole scene may be compared or contrasted with the lovely forest landscape of the Earthly Paradise.

When we emerge from the Hell, however, we are back again in what is—so far as landscape is concerned — a purely natural world. And the region thereof is fair and calm. The day-break is in act of consummation. The Visionary and his guide are approaching a reedy shore, where waves break gently on an oozy bed. They touch it at a spot where (being in shadow) the dew—as yet undried by the breeze of morning—has scarce begun to pass off into vapour. The atmospheric effect in the original is one of incomparable delicacy. And, if I may trust my recollection, it is entirely modern ; there is nothing in the ancient classics which resembles it.

And now you will remember how, when the prescribed rites have been performed, the pilgrims turn them to a mountain side. It is too difficult for them to climb, except by special direction. Moving in single file, they engage in a path which is described as no wider than the gap in a vineyard hedge—such a gap as the vinedresser might stop with one forked branch of thorn. And so, pent in beneath precipitous crags, they begin their ascent, climbing with hands as well as feet. (In order to make his ideal scene more real to his audience, the poet again likens it to rocky places, actually existing, which he names.)

The climbers then reach a point of vantage, whence they survey the mountain stretching afar in front of them; and whence—under the guidance of Sordello—they come in time to a valley scooped out in the mountain-side, where, amid grass and fairest and most fragrant flowers, are seated the spirits of men and women, who chant a heavenly canticle. The reedy shore, the steep and narrow pathway, the mountain-side, the flowery dell: these, taken together, form a landscape-sequence at once of enchanting beauty and of wonderful reality. Judged from the point of view of landscape, I remember nothing like it in literature of an earlier date.

But I must not tarry too long over this part of my subject. A single specimen of landscape from the Paradise, and I pass

on. I choose an example of a somewhat different kind from those already cited; one which in the original reads consecutively—in which the various touches which contribute to the picture do not require to be specially brought together. It is a beautiful little vignette of the island of Sicily as seen from the sea:—

The realm

Where, on the gulf by stormy Eurus lash'd,  
Betwixt Pelorus and Pachynian heights,  
The beautiful Trinacria lies in gloom—  
Not thro' Typhœus but the vapouring cloud  
Bituminous upstream'd.\*

The translation is Cary's. Typhœus was fabled to have been buried under Aetna. The picture is complete in itself, and the fretted seashore, stretching between its flanking mountains, shadowed by its volcanic cloud or streamer, rises before us, as I think, as if by magic.

And now, having glanced at these few specimens of the poet's art in landscape, let us turn to examine one or two of their most notable characteristics.

We have already noted the obvious one of powerful and vivid imaginative vision, and have just touched, too, on the art with which the scenes and objects of the natural world are harmonized with the substance of the poet's dream of the supernatural—are pressed, as it were, into the service of that dream, and made at once to body it

\* Cf. Pindar's First Pythian.

forth and to heighten its effects. I do not wish to-day to enter into the vexed question of symbolism, which belongs as much to the ethical as to the æsthetic aspect of the poem; yet one cannot altogether overlook the subtle and beautiful harmony or analogy subsisting between the sombre, "God-forsaken" landscape of the penal region and its moral gloom and despair, or between a translucent atmosphere and arduous mountain-side and the sentiment of a region of purgation.

After these things, we are most struck, perhaps, by the substantial quality of Dante's landscape, by its solidity and definiteness of outline, in which last particular it recalls the drawing of Mantegna, a painter, born a full hundred years after the poet's death. In order to bring out this quality, you will, perhaps, allow me to contrast the Dantesque landscape with that of another poet, of earlier date, Ossian.

Now, in the form in which most of us know him, Ossian has been—to employ a slang term—"faked." None the less it is to-day universally admitted that Macpherson had really studied the Gaelic originals from which he professed to work, and that his versions—whilst misleading in regard to their epic form—do undoubtedly possess a foundation of the genuine article. For the purpose of a consideration of general characteristics, that foundation may doubtless suffice us. Ossian, then, is the land-

scape poet of the wind and of the mist ; of the driving cloud, the breaking wave, the lashing rain ; of the weed that is rooted in ruin and shivers before the storm. He is the poet of natural turmoil and decay, one might almost say of nature in a state of flux. The modern Shelley, with all the loveliness of his poetry, unites something of like insubstantiality. But Dante builds up his rocks and piles his mountains solidly. He has no over-mastering preference for any one aspect of nature. His atmosphere is aerial, but his earth has also the proper quality of earth ; it is substantial, definite in outline. In this respect his landscape might, perhaps, be set against Ossian's as typical of the contrast between Latin racial characteristics and those of the Gaelic Celt. At the least, it is sane, universal, altogether untouched by the hectic or, as we now say, neurotic element.

We are next impressed, in all probability, by its precision and circumstantiality. We may see this characteristic in its simplest form in such a passage as that from the Paradise where the poet is describing a still stream :—

Clear and untroubled, flowing not so deep  
As that its bed is dark.

There is nothing here of the *à peu près*. In the Hell, in describing how himself and Virgil followed the torrent toward the Stygian lake, he tells us.

We, in company  
Of the inky waters, journeying by their side,  
Enter'd, tho' by a different track, beneath.

“By a different track.” Why does he think it worth while to tell us that? Had we been reading in Defoe, we might have assumed that this dwelling on an apparently non-essential detail was a trick to obtain verisimilitude for the narrative. But to the high serious mind of a Dante, such procedure would be altogether foreign. This precision proceeds, then, from intensity and completeness of poetic vision; and it pervades the Comedy.

Circumstantiality.—Did time permit, one might quote various passages in illustration of this quality or characteristic in the poet's landscape. For instance, that which describes the ascent to the church of San Miniato, near Florence—familiar, doubtless, to many of my hearers: I choose, instead, the description of the birthplace of St. Francis at Assisi :—

Between Tupino and the wave that falls  
From blest Ubaldo's chosen hill, there hangs  
Rich slope of mountain high.....

(So he marks off the boundaries, and gives the general character of the locality).

Whence heat and cold  
Are wafted thro' Perugia's eastern gate.

Its climate — the untempered mountain climate—and its bearings. Lastly, the

actual spot of the momentous occurrence:—

Upon that side

Where it doth break its steepness most, arose  
A sun upon the world.

Could anything be at once more tersely detailed and more scrupulously accurate? With the poet's description in one's hand one could find the way to the spot, as well as with the help of Baedecker.

As a last example of precise and circumstantial delineation of scenery, you may perhaps remember that, in describing the rocky cornice which he climbed after entering at the Gate of Purgatory, the poet gives us the actual measurement of the pathway. It measures thrice the stature of a man (say some eighteen feet) in breadth. Nor is this a unique instance. But, indeed, the whole scenery of this cornice could scarcely have been described with greater pains had the poet intended that his friend Giotto should make a finished drawing after the description; and in this relation it is worthy of note, in passing, that Dante's literary landscape is enormously in advance of the landscape background—such as it was—of the great contemporary painter. Indeed, if we wish to find a painted landscape comparable to that I have cited from the Purgatory, we must pass on, I think, to Pietro Perugino, in the fifteenth century; so that, as a vehicle of landscape, an instrument of landscape-painting, the art of letters attained to maturity much earlier

than did that of line and colour—a somewhat curious artistic fact.

In respect of landscape, what was Dante's contribution to the development of the art of poetry? In order to answer that question it would be necessary to compare the Dantesque landscape with that of preceding poets, and this I have only time to do in a very summary way indeed.

Roughly speaking, the interval which divides Dante from the Ancient Classics is bridged by the Provençal Troubadours, by the epics and popular poems of the Arthurian and Carlovingian cycles, and by mediæval Latin poetry. The earliest of the Troubadours was, I believe, William of Poictiers, born in the year 1071; and, as the school of poetry which he founded lasted about two hundred years, it carries us to Dante's time. But, though the Troubadours were masters of an intense and highly personal expression of the love-passion, neither the subjective character of their inspiration nor the lyric form of their compositions greatly lent itself to landscape. The same may be said of the contemporary Minnesingers; and so was it, I think—though not for the same reasons—with the poems which grouped themselves round the great kingly figures of Arthur and of Charles. For instance, whatever merits may be possessed by such representative

poems as the *Chanson de Roland*, attributed to Tuoldus,\* or the *Sir Tristrem* of Thomas the Rhymer, in respect of landscape they yield us little; they were too much occupied with the deeds of men for that. So that, if in this particular we would find a comparison for Dante, we must turn back to the Greek and Latin classics.

In so turning the names of Virgil and of Lucretius are probably the first that occur to us. An exquisite feeling for nature pervades and dominates at least the earlier work of Virgil, which is also, perhaps, his more perfect work; whilst in Lucretius we find what artists designate "studies" of natural objects, which in all probability have never been surpassed. Yet I do not think that either of these poets paid much attention to that on which I have to-night laid stress as essential to the higher forms of landscape in literature—I mean to landscape-composition. Let us go back, then, in the first instance, to Theocritus, who wrote, as you will remember, in the third century before the Christian Era. In the thirteenth Idyll of the Doric singer there occurs a landscape - composition which, though slight, is beautiful. The poet is describing the errand of the boy Hylas to fetch water for his master, in

\* Tuoldus appears in the Bayeux tapestry with a label giving his name

an unknown island, where, in the course of their seafaring, the hero and his follower have just landed. The translation is Mr. Hallard's:—

And fair-hair'd Hylas ran for water to mix with  
the wine  
Of Telamon, stubborn man, and Heracles' self  
divine—  
(At the board those comrade kings sat ever side  
by side)—  
A brazen pitcher he swings in his hand, and  
soon he spied  
A spring in a hollow dell ; lush reeds about it  
grew,  
The swallow-wort's purple bell, and maiden-  
hair pale of hue,  
And parsley blooming fair, and marsh-loving  
marigold :  
In the midst of the water there, the nymphs a  
revel hold.

There is an example of a Greek poet's landscape. A Latin poet, Propertius, born about the year 50 before Christ—about twenty years later than Virgil, that is—has treated the same theme. And what gives his version a special interest for ourselves to-night is the fact that, whilst in essentials following Theocritus, Propertius has thought fit to vary the landscape, thus showing that he possessed a taste of his own in that particular. I regret that I can only give you a prose version of his poetry:—

“Alas for Hylas ! on went he into the woods.  
Neath the crest of Arganthus was the well of  
Pege—a cool retreat, dear to the nymphs of

Thynia. Above its waters dewy fruits, unintended by the hand of mortal man, hung from the lonely trees : And round about, in the abundant grass, rose lilies—white, and mingled with the scarlet flame of the poppy."

Here you will observe that the surrounding woods, the mountain crest, the wild orchard, are all introductions of Propertius, who has also substituted favourite flowers of his own for those of the elder poet.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, after all, I have furnished no adequate basis for a comparison, and I have no desire to press one. We may surely be content to say that beautiful is the landscape of Dante, beatiful also that of his Greek and Roman precursors. But without forcing comparison to the point where it becomes odious, may I state my own personal conviction that, at least in the art of landscape-composition, Dante has transcended and excelled even those mighty rivals ? We may say at least, I think, that he brought landscape in poetry back to the point where they had left it, and added to it a certain art, a certain grace, which were peculiarly his own.

Let me now hastily sum up, and I shall trespass no longer on your patience. The poet of the *Divine Comedy* possesses in an extraordinary degree poetic vision. But he does not confine himself to the description, however vivid, of single natural objects : he composes such objects with fine art into pictures or landscapes. These landscapes

are intensely realized : hence definitely outlined, and described with precision and circumstantiality. In landscape art the poet out-distances his immediate predecessors ; equals, and in some respects surpasses, the classic poets of Greece and Rome. Our divine Dante ! matchless indeed was his art. We think of it yet once again, and with quick fervour we are tempted to exclaim

*Tu sei lo mio maestro e il mio autore.*

Presumption ! In the presence of a spirit so potent, so majestic, so remote from human frailty, better befits us the bowed mind and bended head—the attitude of lowliest, most unbounded admiration :

*Onorate l' altissimo poeta !*

ultimate guide in all matters spiritual, even as he conceived the head of the Empire to be the ultimate guide in all matters temporal. We had better now get into our minds the truth, too often forgotten, that Dante is an idealist; he sees things as they ought to be, and is naturally horrified and unduly disturbed when he experiences them as they are. All idealists—and I conceive them for the most part to be a noble race—suffer in like manner; their heads are in the skies, their feet on earth, and unhappy material conditions, caused by the finiteness of our nature, offer many stumbling-blocks. Dante's conception of the proper government of the Empire—that is, the Empire of his day—was magnificent in the extreme. There were the two heads, the Emperor and the Pope, each with his own special functions, neither encroaching on the powers or privileges of the other, but properly fulfilling their respective duties; the one attending most carefully and paternally to the every-day wants of his subjects, and protecting them from harm and danger, even as the other had a proper and religious care of their souls' health, and pointed them the way to salvation. The Emperor for the body, the Pope for the soul. These represent the dual nature of man, and accordingly supply his wants. But what about insatiate ambition? What about greed for power? What about consuming jealousy? All

these, and many kindred passions which have their bad and good side, step in and change the whole picture, as Dante found to his cost. He reels as one stunned with the blows daily delivered to his idealism ; yet, all honour to the man, he preserves his ideals to the last.

Another point that we must grasp is that Dante lived in a time of which most of us know but little. Our methods are now so far removed from those of the Middle Ages that in many cases we can hardly understand, much less sympathize with, the faith that obtained in those times. Dante was a fervid Romanist. To him the Pope was really the Vicar of Christ. He believed most thoroughly in theology as the summing-up of all the sciences. He was saturated with the teaching of the Schoolmen. He could not conceive any questioning about the eternal realities as set out for all Christians in the implacable logic of that age. You must take him, then, as a thoroughly mediæval product ; and therefore you ought not to place him before yourself as a modern, or wonder if you find him saying things which seem to you most old-fashioned or most bigoted. The manner in which he has located those he has known in the flesh and those he has read about, in the various divisions of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, in his immortal Comedy is most perplexing—there is no one but can admit this, but I fancy some-

times that we are reading with too present-day a mind, and hence the amazement.

I have thought that instead of copious extracts from commentaries, and I fancy we could fill a good part of, and perhaps all, this hall with books on Dante and his works, it would be better to go to the fountain-head and see really how Dante treats his Popes, especially those who were his contemporaries, when he is writing his *magnum opus*, the *Divine Comedy*. He had the good fortune, or evil fortune, which you like, to live under fourteen Popes, and alludes to nine out of these fourteen. Now if we observe carefully where in his trilogy he places these worthies, we shall have a further idea not only of his opinion of the Papacy, but of his thinking as to individual occupants of the Holy See. I am supposing that you have all read the Comedy, not once, but many times, and if you have not, begin to do so at once. I am no Dante scholar; I am not worthy even to mention his name; but I can say unhesitatingly that anything more uplifting, more invigorating to the intellectual powers, more interesting historically, more nourishing spiritually, than a thoughtful study of the Comedy, I know not of, save and except, and of course you will expect me to say this, and I *should* say it in any case—save and except the Bible. But I hear that the Bible is passing out of fashion, and if you feel it to be so, try then Dante, and see if he does not send

you back to the Bible, with a new view of its beauties. "Parson has begun to preach already!" Yes, and why not; "in season and out of season," like our dear poet.

But I now must most politely ask you to descend with me into Hell, for our Popes are not secure from such an awful region, The appalling majesty of Dante's Hell, will, if you ever properly apprehend it, give you more than one shiver. After passing the entrance, with its inscription of awful horror, we see amongst a cloud of spirits "running behind a flag in great haste and confusion, urged on by furious wasps and hornets," the dim and misty shade of one who has been variously identified, but who seems, as one peers through the mist of the ages, to bear a resemblance to that luckless creature the hermit-Pope, Celestine V., who reigned for only five months, who is spoken of by Dante with loathing scorn as the one "who through cowardice made the great refusal," or "denial." He is now amongst a crowd of souls "who lived without blame and without praise," people whom Dante leaves on the threshold of Hell, as hardly seeming worthy even of those awful torments. If this be the poor old man of eighty years who was dragged against his will from his mountain cell in the Abruzzi to be placed at the head of Christendom, it seems rather hard that he should be condemned because he found the duties of his high office beyond his strength and not consonant with his

quiet contemplative habits. The key to such condemnation may perhaps be found in the fact that he was succeeded, some say supplanted, by Dante's greatest enemy, Pope Boniface VIII. A quaint account is preserved for us of how crafty Boniface went one night and sounded a trumpet in the ears of timid Celestine, and when the latter, half-awakened from a troubled sleep, tremblingly asked, "Who is it?" the reply came in sonorous tones, "I am the angel of God sent to you as to His most devoted servant; and on His behalf I tell you that you are more concerned with your own spiritual welfare than with the pomps and ceremony of this world," which words so frightened the old man, so says the chronicler, that he never rested till he gave up the Papal tiara to Boniface. It is only just to poor Celestine's memory to say that he was canonized seven years after Dante's death.

Passing rapidly through the various circles of Hell—and would that there were time to strive to paint a vivid picture of each—in the Fourth Circle we notice in a corner a group of spirits with countenances so rubbed out, as it were, that they cannot be distinguished one from the other, but faint traces of tonsures on their heads betray their class, and we hear, perhaps not with surprise, that amongst them are Popes and Cardinals, "in whom avarice does its utmost." We have crossed the Sixth Circle

and are standing on the edge of a rocky precipice, and shelter ourselves beneath a huge monument which wards off somewhat the dreadful and noisome stench which exhales from the valley beneath, and on this same monument we can with difficulty discern a time-worn inscription, "I hold Pope Anastatius, whom Photinus drew from the straight way." But as it would seem that here the murky air of Hell has for a moment a little obscured Dante's historical knowledge, we do not linger, but leave the gloomy pile, a dread landmark in this heretical region, and hasten on.

We have now descended to a great depth in the inverted funnel leading to the earth's centre which Dante makes his material Hell, and are in the third chasm of that singular region which we may denominate by the term "Hell-Pits," or, as has been well suggested, "Evil Pouches." This is the region of those who during their earthly career have practised simony, a sin that Dante most especially condemns. These wretched sinners are all "fixed one by one in narrow round holes, along the sides and bottom of the rock, with the head downwards, so than nothing more than the feet and part of the legs stands out. The soles of them are tormented with flames which keep flickering from the heels to the toes, and burn with a brightness and intensity proportioned to the different degrees of guilt." I have given you this long descrip-

tion because it seems to me, and I hope you will pardon any approach to levity, such a very awkward and undignified position for a Pope to be discovered in, especially if one thinks of him as one sees him on this earth in mortal guise ; but I am not sure whether spirits wear *all* the papal vestments. This ill-judged humour is very wrong, but I cannot resist it. The Pope we here find is Nicholas III., who reigned 1277 to 1280. I cannot refrain from quoting Dante's naïve questioning, "Master ! who is that who writhes himself, quivering more than all his fellows, and sucked by ruddier flame ?" This Pope was the one who had some shady dealings with the Greek Emperor of that time, and by the connivance of the two was indirectly brought about that terrible uprising known as the "Sicilian Vespers."

If I may digress for one moment, I should like to say that even now in Sicily the feeling of hatred against the French which was so fiercely roused at the time of the Vespers still exists. In some conversation with a leading Sicilian, he assured me that his countrymen, especially those of the lower-class, look askance at that race, whilst they are animated by the most friendly feelings in receiving the inhabitants of perfidious Albion.

Now to Pope Nicholas, and we must examine this episode carefully, for if I may venture such a remark, it proves Dante-

to be a master hand at what we may call stagecraft. Poor Nicholas, head downwards and feet in air, of course cannot see who is approaching (how he can speak is to me a mystery), and Dante, with much ingenuity, makes him fancy that Boniface, his successor, is coming to take his place, even before his proper and appointed time. Directly Boniface does really come, poor Nicholas will drop down lower into his hole, even as have those who preceded him, who are now beneath his head, all of them Popes, addicted to the same practices. Nicholas has evidently been on the look-out for Boniface for some time, and seems quite disappointed on hearing that he is not yet to try a little of the foot-warming, and he takes occasion prophetically to say, that even after Boniface, there shall come still another Pope, "a lawless shepherd, of uglier deeds, fit to cover him and me." Dante, appreciating the full import of the occasion, launches out into a tremendous invective against these so unworthy occupants of Peter's chair; but I note particularly that in the midst of all this storm of righteous passion he is careful to state that, "reverence for the Great Keys," the prerogative of the Papacy, hinders him from using heavier words, so that, as I have said, you will always find with him abuse of the individual, the Pope, but not of the office, the Papacy itself. This whole passage ends with the following lines, which prove

to me that Dante was in truth more of a quiet humourist than most people imagine ; over and over again I find a distinct vein of fun running beneath the surface, little in accord with the sardonic, malevolent picture, so often painted, of our great Master. But to the lines,—“And whilst I sung these notes to him, whether it was rage or conscience gnawed him, he violently sprawled with both his feet.”

We pass on, and going through the Eighth Circle of Hell Pits, the circle of Evil Counsellors, where the damned spirits are, like so many gigantic fireflies, flitting hither and thither in roaring pennants of flame, we hear amidst the tumult a voice, high-pitched and in anguished tones, testifying again to the black wickedness of Pope Boniface VIII., “The Great Priest, may ill befall him !” “The Prince of the new Pharisees,” the prelate who, in the plenitude of his power—and, remember, he summarized in himself all the decaying magnificence of the Middle Ages—said, “Heaven I can shut and open, as thou knowest,” and this not as an absolute statement of fact, but in order to be revenged upon his enemies, for the words, working like poison dropped i’ the ear, envenomed a once-repentant man to fresh deeds of violence.

I am glad to say that, so far as I know, our search for Popes, in the *Inferno*, is now at an end ; we have passed the icy horror

married some one else, and had a family—He invented his *Inferno* in order to put his enemies there, all roasting, boiling, baking, or frying. It was pure personal spite—and it is the very force of his vindictiveness that makes the *Inferno* the best part of his epic." I think the writer, or speaker, really ought to be commissioned to write a popular life of Dante to be read to tiresome children on Sundays.

Now we have frivelled enough and are serious once more. Hearing on our way through Ante-Purgatory a brief allusion from the lips of the murdered Manfred to the heartless and foolishly vengeful conduct of Pope Clement IV., who ruled when Dante was a prattling or silent child—I know not which—of tender years, we mount up to the entrance of Purgatory proper; and here a most sublime spectacle meets our gaze. One might almost say in words of old, "This is none other than the gate of heaven!" It reminds us of one of those passages of gorgeous imagery to be found so plentifully in the last book of the New Testament, and you will come across the same thing, only painted in more glowing colours, in the triumphant procession which will meet our astonished gaze at the top of the Mount. A glorious angel, his countenance transfigured and shining with heavenly light, the awful reflection of God's gaze, sits with flashing sword in a narrow doorway on a threshold

gleaming with the scintillating rays of the diamond. And beneath his feet are three steep steps: the lowest of purest white marble, such as one sees new hewn from the quarries of Carrara; the second of rough grey stone, cracked and broken in all its length; the third, on which God's messenger rests his feet, of full, rich, glowing porphyry, "so flaming red as blood that spouts from a vein." Dante's words in describing such a scene are few, but so selected that each one bites into the mind. The symbolical significance of the steps as generally interpreted, and with every show of reason, is the doctrine of repentance, with its several parts of confession; contrition, the grey stone being riven throughout to represent the broken and contrite heart; and satisfaction, the heart all aglow with the heaven-sent grace of charity. But the angel—who or what is he? As to this point, opinions are many and different. Some have fancied he represents the Grand Penitentiary, because in the same manner as he (the angel) strikes Dante's forehead with the sword, so that functionary taps on the head with a long wand the kneeling crowds who flock to St. Peter's or one of the great basilicas to seek this pardoning sign; but I see here no resemblance whatever. It appears to me, looking at the words which the angel speaks as to holding the keys from Peter, that we have here in mystic semblance the Church transfigured,

the spiritual power ennobled and lifted to the ideal sphere which Dante so loved—the Papacy as it ought to be, not, as in his life, Dante saw it. Here we see the consolatory, the healing aspect of the Church as it should be, expressed in the person of its chief pastor. Whilst convicting and reminding of sin, it at the same time stretches out arms of mercy to the truly penitent. By purgation the soul is gradually purified for heavenly mansions, and you will remember that as the P's (the seven deadly *peccata* with which Dante's forehead is now branded) are gently brushed away with the soft caress of angelic wings, so he feels himself less wearied in making the at first painful and laborious ascent of the Mount.

Before we meet our next Pope we have made considerable progress, and have passed over more than one of the many terraces, all storied and sculptured after the fashion of the great Italian cathedrals; and though our eyes are stinging with the dense and acrid mist (a faint reminiscence of our former journey) which meets us in the wrathful region, our ears are not closed to the significant pronouncement, "Rome was wont to have two suns—that of the world and that of God," and afterwards, "the Church of Rome, by confounding two powers in herself, falls into the mire." Here is most clearly enunciated by Dante the doctrine which so possessed him, and

which you will find set forth in real scholastic though impractical fashion in his treatise, mistakenly called political, the *De Monarchia*. The Papacy and the Empire were to exist side by side, but never to infringe the proper limits of their authority. The sway of the Papacy was altogether spiritual; the Emperor's dominion concerned itself with all temporalities. Directly the Papacy flirted with the Empire, trouble might be seen to be brewing in the distance; when an individual Pope deserted his natural ally, the Emperor, and ogled a foreign monarch, then in Dante's eyes was the Papacy, so resplendent in itself, befouled. To Dante Rome was the centre of the world; it was the sacred, the holy city, without equal, safe from rivalry, so long as she held to her divinely appointed mission. She it was that gave the ruler his imperial crown, the priest his Peter's chair, and when one or other deserted her, then was the world out of joint, and its mistress bowed her head in the dust. To what an extent individual Popes had in these Middle Ages o'erpassed the dominion which Dante ascribed to them, may be seen from the well-known demand that "Christian Emperors must subordinate their actions not only to the Pope, but even to other clergy."

But let us not linger. We climb on till we reach the terrace where are the avaricious and prodigal, lying face down-

wards flat on the pavement, all weeping bitterly—"the people who distil through their eyes the evil that fills the whole world." Amongst this lamentable folk we discover one who in "one month and little more" discovered how crushing a burden is the Papacy to any Pope who wishes to keep the dignity pure and unsullied. But, alas! what says this shade? "When I was made Pastor of Rome I discovered the life which is false." According to his own statement, the call of Pope Adrian V. to the supreme pontificate was the means of his conversion, and the snatching of him from a life of deepest avarice, for which he is even now enduring purgatory - torments. I think it interesting to note that this poor creature was in his earthly day sent as Papal legate to this country, and had a hand in appeasing the quarrelsome baronial element which in this land, as in others, was in Dante's days so troublesome a feature of everyday life. We now have a very clear indication of the point upon which I am always insisting — Dante's absolute and unmistakable reverence for the Papacy as a divine institution. He falls on his knees by the side of Adrian, who, though he is still grovelling and cannot see what is passing, yet by an excessive and perhaps compensating acuteness of hearing becomes aware of the poet's attitude, and in words that seem to be almost directly copied from the Apocalyptic

book of the New Testament bids him remember that he, though a past Pope, is after all only miserably human. And note what Dante says: "Because of your dignity"—*i.e.*, your dignity as the successor of St. Peter, and not for any peculiarly personal trait—"my conscience smote me for standing." It seems a little difficult to conceive in the mind's eye so unpicturesque a scene as Dante on bended knee by the side of a weeping, groaning, prostrate spirit—a shade who yet seems to have corporeal semblance! But I am here reminded of a wise remark made to me by our accomplished and genial secretary: "You must not *precise* these things too much; all is vague, shadowy, uncertain, and expressly so. There is the root-thought—the idea, in many cases magnificently expressed, but not to be rationalised." I consider this a most saving and necessary caution for the reader of Dante's works, though I know I myself, even in this paper, am sadly sinning against what I would so strongly praise.

Before we leave this avaricious region we must listen to some words from another wailing, downcast spirit, the ancestor of the royal line of France, who explains in seer-like vision the events that have so disgraced his descendants, culminating in the outrage offered by Philip the Fair to Pope Boniface VIII. in his papal city of Anagni, an outrage which resulted in the

old despot's death in his palace of the Vatican shortly afterwards. Boniface was a wicked and shameless ecclesiastic, but (if this be any palliation) a princely patron of the fine arts, and a man to be remembered as having instituted the Jubilee at Rome, an institution helpful to the coffers of Mother Church, but of doubtful benefit from a spiritual point of view. Still, I mention this fact of the Jubilee because it is generally supposed that Dante was in Rome then, and saw that enormous concourse of pilgrims which was the wonder of the then civilised world. That Dante ever went on an embassy to the Pope I cannot believe; but we may be very sure that if he ever did so he was most careful to pay the greatest homage and respect to the great spiritual luminary of the Eternal City, though in his heart of hearts he detested the particular Pope whom he then saw, because he was, amongst other injuries, somewhat the cause of Dante's banishment from his so dear Florence. It says much for Dante's true nobility of character that he says of this outrage on Pope Boniface, his deadly enemy, that it is like the crucifying of Christ afresh, because God's Vicar is, in the eyes of all the world, put to an open shame. "I see the vinegar and the gall renewed, and Him slain between living thieves." The imagery here used is, of course, very bold in character; but it accentuates the absolute religiosity of

the man who, despite these periods of storm and stress, about which we hear so much, and which represent him as having lost all spiritual balance, yet was, as I think, according to his measure and opportunity, a most impassioned believer.

We are now on a higher terrace, passing a haggard crowd. So emaciated are the forms around us, that they seem literally skin and bone, their flesh almost dried to parchment, their lustreless eyes deep down in their bony sockets, their countenances so disfigured in form by this biting leanness as to be hardly recognizable; and these are, by the law of opposites, the gluttonous, and amongst them we are grieved to see, with visage shrivelled more than the others—because, I suppose, he was correspondingly greedy in life—another Pope, Pope Martin IV., the vassal of Charles of Anjou. “From Tours sprang he, and by fasting purges the eels of Bolsena and the sweet wine.” These particular eels, coming from one of the largest lakes in Central Italy, were, it is said, kept in milk, and then stewed in wine—what wine is not expressly mentioned. Why Dante should have seized upon this amiable weakness is to me a mystery, especially seeing that this same Pope was to a large extent the means of destroying all possibility of continuous union between the Eastern and Western Churches, and created cardinal Benedetto Gaetani, afterwards Boniface VIII., of

whom we have just been speaking. Evidently Dante must from intimate knowledge have rightly gauged the man, and found this to be a weak spot in his armour. I should mention that during this Pope's reign Siger of Brabant, Professor at the University of Paris, who is placed by Dante in the Heaven of the Sun, was done to death, probably at Martin's instigation, at Orvieto, during the time that the Papal Court was then in residence.

We are now approaching the Earthly Paradise, which is on the top of the Mount, a region swept with sweet breezes, cooled by pure streams, laden with sweet odours, full of the song of birds, graced by the presence of such beatuously sweet ladies as Matilda and the long-sought Beatrice. The faithful Virgil will now take his sorrowing leave of our poet, and in his leave-taking he utters these mystical words, "I do crown and mitre thee over thyself." What they really mean I leave for you to determine. They seem to me to convey an insistence on the truth contained in Scripture that we are potentially, every one of us, though we little realise it, kings and priests unto God.

We must not linger in this Eden garden, though we would fain feast our eyes with the pageant that moves slowly with majestic tread through the wood, and which, coming gradually into the open, strikes us dumb with its finely conceived splendour. We

want a thousand eyes to gaze upon the triumphal car drawn by the mysterious griffon with huge waving wings; the rear-guard of solemn sages in snowy raiment and rosy chaplets; the Botticellian groups of dancing damsels in red, white, green, and purple; the flaming lights painting the clouds with ever-varying hues; the living creatures crowned with leaves, and plumed each with six peacock tails; the white-robed elders, *coronati di fiordaliso*. And our sight aches again as we gaze. Then ensues what really seems a sacred masque, somewhat in the style of a morality play, of which the main motives are drawn bodily from that treasure-house of mysticism and heavenly drama, the book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine. This, of course, does not concern our subject, as, indeed, is the case with much that I have written; but one is somehow so tempted to dwell first on this scene and then on another, that were not time limits wisely imposed we might be here all night talking over the beauties of the truly *Divine Comedy*. I would only briefly add that the concluding scene in this strange "mystery" shows us the figure, familiar in Scripture, of the shameless harlot, "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus," toying in amorous dalliance with a huge giant, who on a sudden, in an access of jealous rage, belabours her, beating her and bruising her

from head to foot, with a many-thonged whip, and finally drags her away into the wood. Whether in this you may see symbolically the intriguing between the French King and the Pope, the subsequent abasement of the Papacy, and the enforced retreat to Avignon, I do not pretend to say, any more than I would make any definite pronouncement as to the Scripture vision.

And here, in another breathing space, though it is almost entirely foreign to our subject, may I be permitted to enter a tardy protest, as a member of this Society, against that presentment of the life and vision of Dante which some time ago held the boards of one of our chief London theatres. All such performances must necessarily, from the nature of the subject, be most unsatisfactory, and the harm they do in putting before the masses a garbled and distorted view of those mediæval times is incalculable. The ecclesiastical element in Sardou's penny-a-liner drama, though it abstained from direct reference to the Pope, was expressed in the most broad and vulgar manner, and the whole thing is to me most amazing as coming from one who ought to be, and really is, a past master in stage-craft. The idea even of representing any part of the Comedy in these days on our modern stage is, to a well-tutored mind, distasteful, if not absurd, and an insult to the memory

of one of Italy's greatest sons. I can conceive a very pretty and charming one-act play being made out of the incidents of the *Vita Nuova* by a writer well acquainted with the history and spirit of the period ; but, this excepted, the rest must be left untouched by common treatment.

We now reach the highest stage of our journey. No longer do we see the Mantuan sage ; no longer do we toil heavily and laboriously amidst scenes of the deepest woe and suffering ; no longer do groans, sighs, wailing shrieks, strident screams resound in our unwilling ears ; no longer do we hurry along to escape the pinchings and nippings of sundry horned devils armed with the most malevolent pitchforks. No ; all is changed. We now float up, the eyes of the sainted Beatrice serving as a lode-star, through the various planets to the real centre of all things, the direct cause and controlling power of the universe, the Face of God ; and as we go from one heavenly realm to another we feel sprouting wings, and we gradually become transformed into some shape consonant with the forms, blazing with light, throbbing with fiery joy, quivering with scintillating sparks in their gladness, that we see around us. And do we lag behind, overawed and fainting with ecstatic delight, the mystic eyes of the great lady draw us upward and onward, and though their brilliancy increases at each further step in our progress, yet we

feel that in them lies our only means of mounting the glorious ladder, all burnished with gold, which brings us so very near to the rose of Paradise, that glorious flower wherein are enclosed all the saints of the Divine Love. But shall we find any Popes in this delectable region? We shall hear *some* mentioned, even if we fail to discover *many*, and mentioned in such terms as warrants attention, but always with that clear separation in thought that extols the office whilst it vilifies the holder. In the planet Venus (of course you will understand that in Dante's days the astronomical system placed the earth where we now put the sun), is the abode of the amorously-inclined. As we are travelling through the lower planets we shall find that even in Paradise there are degrees of blessedness, and earthly and human failings have not been altogether wiped out, or, if wiped out, have left their ineradicable mark, which, according to its intensity, has determined their abiding in these vestibules of bliss. In this planet, then, where all are revolving in one "concerted cosmic dance," whatever that may be, we hear the voice of one of Dante's dearest friends, the celebrated Carlo Martello, who is here a sacred light, and was in the flesh titular King of Hungary, and at the end of a long discourse he makes an attack on the Church as exemplified by the Pope and Cardinals of the time. Born in 1271, and dying in 1295, he

covered in his life the reigns of ten Popes, a fact which speaks eloquently of the intrigue prevalent in the then Papal Court. And these are his words: "The Gospel and great Doctors" (of the Church) "are deserted, and only the Decretals" (to support the ever-increasing claims of the Popes) "are so studied, as may be seen upon their" (well-thumbed and annotated) "margins. Thereon" (on money getting) "the Pope and Cardinals are intent; ne'er wend their thoughts to Nazareth, where Gabriel spread his wings." These sentences are very like to others that may be found in an epistle—now, I believe, not included in the Dantesque Canon—that Dante is said to have written to the Italian Cardinals, and which runs as follows, and it repoints what has already been stated as to the neglected study of the great Church Fathers:—"Thy Gregory lies among the cobwebs; Ambrose lies on the neglected shelves of the clergy; Augustine lies forgotten; Dionysius, Damascenus, and Bede have been thrown aside." These statements require no comment; they are, as we know by the history of the period, crystalline truth. Before we leave this bright young spirit, turning our thoughts aside for an instant from our main theme, we remember that in the earlier part of his oration he uttered these remarkable sentiments, which I commend to be pondered over by all parents. "If the world down there took heed to the foundation nature

layeth, and followed it, it would have satisfaction in its folk. But ye wrench to a religious order him born to gird a sword, and make a king of him who should be for discourse ; wherefore your track runneth outside the direct path." There is no occasion for me to dilate upon the question of how much irreparable harm is effected on offspring by the sometimes persistent parental effort to squeeze a square peg into a round hole. A consideration of Charles's words, as above, shows, if nothing else, how eminently useful is the study of our great Italian poet and his works. Lessons of practical wisdom are for all generations, and in this sense Dante is surely immortal as a writer.

In the planet of the sun, amidst blazing lights, inimitable music, dazzling circles of revolving lights, ineffable voices chanting the histories of St. Francis of the stigmata, and the heavenly athlete, St. Dominic, we hear pronounced the names of certain illustrious : and amongst these Pietro Hispano, who appears to be chiefly celebrated in Dante's mind as one "who giveth light in twelve booklets," a system of logic in which occurs the formula well known to all students, the *memoria technica* of "Barbara Celarent." In his earthly career this Portuguese, though commencing as a physician, gradually ascended to the Papal throne as Pope John XXI. ; but he did not long enjoy the honour of his exalted position, for he

was smothered by the fall of a ceiling in his palace at Viterbo, that charming old city, so replete with an interest of classic and mediæval association.

Flitting by the blazing blood-red cross of warrior saints in Mars, we fancy, as we are gliding up through the "silvery white sphere" of Jupiter, that we hear a passing reference to another Pope, John XXII., who is bidden to reflect "that Peter and Paul, who died for the vineyard thou layest waste, are living yet." Considering, as is said, that this Pope left at his death a treasure valued at eighteen million gold florins—and we know where the florins came from—besides plate, jewels, and precious stones worth seven millions more, it is not surprising to hear this admonition, nor to note that Villani, the historian of that time, ingenuously remarks, "The good man did not seem to remember the words of Christ: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.'"

In the sphere of Saturn—the Jacob's Ladder sphere—amongst those beauteous forms who descend the heavenly staircase, reflecting back by his glorious light the shimmer and sheen of the crystal and gold encased footways, comes one who was on earth a Cardinal, and who therefore knew something of his colleagues, and who, contrasting them with the early followers of the despised Nazarene, says: "Now the modern pastors must needs be

buttressed on this side and on that, and have one to lead them on, so heavy are they" (in weight), "and one to hoist behind. With their mantles they o'er-spread their palfreys, so that two beasts travel beneath one hide." This language is hardly attuned to its surroundings, but the illustrative truth of the picture presented is not at all confined to Dante's day. You will see that even in Paradise trenchant humour is not altogether *chose defendue*.

We have now passed the planets. With lightning-like rapidity we have mounted the golden stairway whose top ends in the region of the stars, the antechamber to Heaven in its essence and perfection, whither are returning all those spirits with whom we have had converse to cheer us on our upward flight. First looking back through all the seven planets down to the earth, whose rivers with our heaven-strengthened eyes we can see from their rising to their outgoing; and then with dizzied brain turning our gaze upward for reassuring counsel to the beauteous eyes of the lady Beatrice, who stands "erect and eager," like the bird who, after brooding all night "amidst the loved foliage on the nest of her sweet offspring," now eagerly looks for the first rainbow flecking of the sky by the approaching dawn. So we mount up, seeing and hearing many things which it is not lawful nor possible for man

to reveal, nor for tongue nor pen to describe. After beholding in glorious spectacle the crowning of the Virgin, we come to the presence of "so blissful a flame that it left none there of greater brightness," and we are assured that we stand before one who was reputed to be the first bishop of that city which is well called "Eternal."

Here we arrive at the *sponsa et origo* of the Papacy, and we are not surprised that some allusion should be made thereto, though we may be, considering the speaker, amazed beyond reason at the form in which it is cast. A sickly gloom o'erspreads the rosy glow surrounding us; there is absolute and entire silence—a silence of so extreme a tension that it can be painfully felt. The forms before us become changed and threatening in aspect; distant thunderings add to the terror of the strange darkness. The voice of Peter comes pealing forth in harsh accents as he utters this tremendous denunciation: "He who usurpeth on earth my place, my place, my place" (the threefold repetition emphasises most significantly the wicked deed) "which in the presence of the Son of God is vacant, hath made my burial-ground a conduit for that blood and filth, whereby the apostate one" (the Prince of Darkness) "who fell from here above, is soothed down there below." Burning, scorching words, searing for all time the Popes of

those days, and notably the crafty Boniface. There is then a comparison between the early patriarchs of Rome and the mediæval Popes; between the primitive simplicity of an apostolic rule and the shameless indulgence-selling license of those later days; and a final exhortation to Dante: "And thou, my son, who for thy mortal might shalt return below once more, open thy mouth, and hide thou not the thing which I not hide." An almost needless direction to so fiery a spirit as burned and glowed in the breast of our famous Florentine.

Beatrice later takes up the threads of this discourse, and weaves them into a like pattern: "Florence hath not so many Lapos and Bindos" (familiar names in the city) "as the fables of such fashion that yearly are proclaimed from the pulpit on this side and on that; so that the sheep, who know not aught, return from their pasture fed with wind." "Christ said not to his first assembly, 'Go and preach trifles to the world,' but gave them the true foundation." And afterwards the same gracious lady foretells (and this is the last time we hear her dulcet tones) the fearful doom of Clement V., the Gascon, the bought creature of Philip the Fair, who himself so tarnished the lilies of France; the betrayer of Dante's hero, the Emperor Henry VII.; the destroyer of the chivalrous order of Templars; "the lawless pastor of fouler works" than Boniface. "He shall

be thrust down where Simon Magus has his reward, and lower down shall force him of Anagni"; so that there will be one Pope above another in a long column filling up the hell-pit, the head of one standing on the heels of the other, the topmost feet always blistering in the lambent flame. It must have seemed in weird harmony with the fancy of our poet that at Clement's funeral, through carelessness, his coffin caught fire and was burnt, "and his body from the middle downwards."

We awake with a start, we shake ourselves, we rub our eyes, we yawn vigorously, we sneeze twice or thrice! Where are we? *Really* on earth—this beauteous earth which God has made so fair and men have made so foul? Has it all been a dream, then? Yes; a dream and more than a dream, a vision and more than a vision! There is celestial music still in our ears; fearful shapes float vaguely even now before our eyeballs; our hair feels crisp and frizzled, and the smell of fire seems upon it. We are beating the air with our hands to simulate flying; but as our bodily functions gradually assume their proper earthly duties, we are gazing at two pictures in a long gallery of paintings. We hear that one has been removed from under the dome of Brunelleschi at Florence, and the other borrowed from a gallery in Rome; and we are conscious that they have for the moment

been placed side by side that we may more carefully note their import. In one we see, standing before a complex background which somehow seems familiar, a lean, tall figure of a man, clad in the raiment of the Florence of the Middle Ages, and in his hand a book, from which emanate rays of light; and in the other an aged Pope, his face seamed with lines indicating great strength of character combined with vulpine cunning. There he sits, clad in full pontifical vestments, with all the insignia of his holy office, awaiting in the calmness of despair the advent of his pitiless enemies. So here we have Dante, the exile, the man who has tasted of the fruits of banishment the more acutely because of his exquisite sensibility—the ascetic reformer, the mediæval Jeremiah, the poet who has revealed the divine mysteries by God-sent inspiration; and there we have Boniface VIII., the ecclesiastic who raised the Papacy to its greatest height of worldly splendour, and debased it to almost the lowest depths of wickedness as regards its spiritual aspect—the man who was Dante's sworn foe, the greedy Churchman who drove him forth from his native city, the genial patron of compliant artists, but the stern silencer of truth. What more forcible contrast can be presented? Dante's dream is nearly over, his Emperor has failed him, his Popes have fallen from their high estate, he is begin-

ning to learn he is in a finite and imperfect world. Yet always clear before him is the possibility of better things, a never-dying trust in the future, a constant and unshaken belief in his carefully-evolved system of proper governance, a reverence most profound for the things which pass man's understanding and are yet more real than those things upon which men gaze with bodily eyes. Suppose him living in these days; but can you make such a wild effort of imagination? If, however, for a moment you can, you see him more out of tune with the times than in his own day, but you discern him as inwardly thanking his Maker that, though governments are in many places unstable and decentralised, yet in the chair of St. Peter there sit pontiffs who carry his mind back to the gentle occupants who succeeded the great apostle, and though much, very much is at fault still, yet his great longing for a truly spiritual Pope, a man divested of all temporalities whatsoever, seems nearer of accomplishment than in those troublous days in Florence when he sat near his beloved St. John's where the cross was first imprinted on his brow, and watched the ever-moving, chattering crowds, bent on vanity or deeds of violence. I dare say many will think with our poet that in the spirituality of the Church lies its only claim as a help and a guide to salvation. So soon as the temporal craving is allowed to

have a voice, then in that moment rise again the massy gates of Hell, and the indestructibility of the Church is threatened. Dante's plea for a pure Church was not for his own or any particular epoch alone ; it was for all ages and all generations so long as time shall last.

## THE ART OF PORTRAITURE: DANTE AND GOYA

A LECTURE BY MRS. CRAIGIE ("JOHN OLIVER HOBBS"); READ BEFORE THE DANTE SOCIETY, APRIL 13TH, 1904. DR. RICHARD GARNETT, C.B., IN THE CHAIR.

ONE of the charms in addressing the Dante Society rests in the fact that it is not necessary to introduce him, or to apologize for his existence, or to assure you that he is well worth reading, if one can snatch a few minutes from the masterpieces which are daily published and daily praised—as Dante is not. But this is *not* a Goya society, and so I shall feel no diffidence in attempting to tell you something of the personality and the art of that very great Spanish painter. And, if you will bear with me, I will try to justify the step I have taken in placing his name with Dante's as a supreme master of portraiture. You may wish to know first what I mean by portraiture. Well, broadly, I may describe it as the presentation of character, either by colour and lines or by words—that is to say, there are portraits in frames, and portraits in books, and portraits in stage plays. The originals

of many portraits are well known ; others may be guessed ; others, again, may be what are called creations of the artist's own imagination. Nevertheless, they are *all* portraits, and they are all intended to call up to our mind, or to our remembrance, real men and real women. A portrait, therefore, must be judged by many tests. The critic himself must have, above all things, experience and insight, and a thorough familiarity with the technique of the actual art under consideration. The "I-like-it" or "I-don't-like-it" method of approaching other men's work may provide readers with amusing occasional articles, but they are not criticism, nor can they ever carry the weight of criticism. We all know that Sainte-Beuve, in France, and Matthew Arnold, in England — to mention two critics with whom other critics have differed, but whose rare gifts have never been questioned—never wrote of any work unless they gave the best they themselves possessed to the task. There is no reason in the world why the critic should always be right. There is equally no reason why he should always be wrong ; but that he should be careful and highly trained are qualifications he may not lack.

Goya was born in the middle of the eighteenth century, very nearly five hundred years after Dante. He was the son of a small farmer, and while he was

not brought up in poverty, his circumstances were humble. Dante's family—as you all know—was distinguished, rich, and important, and, whereas the Florentine first displayed his genius in writing love poems, the Spaniard first attracted attention to his ability by drawing a pig on a wall. This drawing was noticed by a monk, who undertook the boy's education, and it is pleasing to be able to add that he lived to see the triumphs of his *protégé*. But I will not mislead you about the facts of Goya's education; he was wild, he ran about the fields and threw himself with ardour into all the games and pursuits of Spain. If he had not been a genius there was every outward indication that he was a ne'er-do-well. Yet, while he appeared to be wasting his time and his energy, he was gaining an intimate knowledge of his countrymen and of life as it is lived, he had also that quality which is common to genius of a certain type—he could atone for long periods of dissipation by application of a really prodigious kind. For instance, he taught himself French long before he went to France, and, when he worked, the quickness of his brain could repair the indolence and neglect of years. If he was a wild player, he was a frantic worker, and if he was the central figure of all the fights and all the feasts, he excelled, easily, all his fellow-students in the studio of the old painter under whom he first mastered

his craft. At the age of nineteen he went to Madrid, and we hear of him displaying his talent for music by wandering through the streets of Madrid at night with a guitar, singing irresistible songs to girls on balconies. And, as often happens, the guitar-playing led to further troubles; he had to fly from Madrid terrified by an order of arrest from the Inquisition. In order to get to Rome he made his way to the centre of Spain—earning his journey money by assisting at bull-fights. As one result of his experience in the arena, we have an astonishing series of sketches dealing with bull-fighting, which, in their way, are unsurpassed in power, accuracy, and horror. He reached Rome, where he found friends in two other great Spaniards already famous—Rivera and Velasquez. Goya, strangely enough, does not seem to have been influenced by the Italian school of art. He was not a man who owed much to other painters or to their schools. He was not a man to found a school, and just as it would be impossible to imitate him, he found it impossible to imitate others. Dante was academic. He took Virgil for his model, he surpassed him, but his mind was ever faithful to classical traditions; Goya, on the other hand, was a philosopher first and an artist afterwards. He learned what he could from every source, but he had neither the technique nor the soul of a born poet. Art for art's sake would have

seemed to him absurd, and, indeed, in his time, the question of art for art's sake had not arisen as we understand it now. The Revolution in France and the Inquisition in Spain had produced a type of mind to which such vague impressions as the True and Beautiful, and so forth, would have held neither meaning nor attraction. The truth as Goya saw it about him, so far from being beautiful, was appalling, and, just as Dante—revolted by the iniquities he felt in the political life of his own day—wrote the *Inferno*, Goya sketched life as he saw it, with all the fury and passion of a nature which no influence was ever able to soften. At Rome, therefore, he was untouched by the romance and the relics of the Renaissance and the old masters. He met the French painter David, and from him he heard of the revolutionary and liberal ideas which appealed strongly to his temperament.

In 1780 Goya returned to Madrid and took up his abode there, after an absence of fifteen years. Under the protection of Charles III., he became a Court painter. This appointment, which has always proved disastrous except to the highest order of intelligence, could not alter the inherent qualities of his mind, and, perhaps because he was a satirist and preserved his independent attitude, he became even more successful as a man than as a painter. He had so much power, so much malignity,

his genius was so fertile and his qualities were so brilliant, that, while he made people tremble at the bitterness of his epigrams, the epigrams were nevertheless remembered. Men sought his society, and women of high rank gave his wife much trouble by paying him attention and compliments which she considered uncalled for. The young Duchess of Alba fell so violently in love with Goya that she broke with all her Court associations in order to assert a relationship which was more picturesque than respectable. She was even exiled by the Queen Marie Louise ; Goya accompanied her into her retreat, and, what is a marvellous testimony to his powers, he brought her back with him and made her peace with the indignant Royal Family. He seems to have possessed—what is called in these days—a temperament. He believed in nothing, he doubted everybody, he had no reverence, and, I should say, very little sympathy ; but, with it all, he was much more than a wit. If he were only a satirist, a wit, and a libertine, I could not have placed his name, even for this one evening, beside Dante's. It is not for us to say whether he was capable of feeling deeply—that was his own secret, and it died with him—but we can never doubt that he saw deeply, and, whether he disguised his vision in "mordant irony or in brutal exaggerations, or in crude statements, or in fantasies—which seemed

sometimes to border on madness—the truth is there, and there is his great link with Dante. He knew men and women, and it has been well said of him that “he was not *a* Spaniard, he was *the* Spaniard.” He was intolerant, fanatical, chivalrous, unequal, and, from the English point of view, inconsistent. An unjust man himself, the spectacle of injustice enraged him; a sensitive man himself—as all satirists are—he could apply the red-hot iron to any wound, whether it was his own or his neighbour’s. And yet, with it all, he had, we are told, much personal grace and charm. This grace, at the time he was a favourite of the Queen Marie Louise, took artistic form in some decorative work very much in the manner of Watteau and Lancret. There are a series of decorative works in the gallery at Madrid which are wholly delightful. They are so full of movement, so bright, so sunny, so delicate—it is difficult to realise that the hand which drew and coloured these delicious pictures could have given us also that ghastly series known as ‘The Disasters of War.’

In a former lecture\* here I referred to the terrible changes worked by trouble in the mind of Botticelli, and the difference between his early works and his later ones. There is a still greater difference between those pleasing, never artificial

\* “Dante and Botticelli.” See “The Dante Society Lectures,” vol. i., pp. 37–58.

compositions of Goya, and the revolting sketches he has left which are also drawn, unmistakably, from facts under his own eyes. Indeed one of his most famous sketches has for its title this saying : 'I Have Seen Them.' It represents a piteous group of men and women at the point of a dozen bayonets. I wish the time allowed me to dwell on the many romantic incidents of Goya's career. He died at the advanced age of eighty-five. He knew extremes of poverty and of affluence. He was the Court favourite under three reigns—the reign of Charles III. and Charles IV., he saw the abdication of the latter, and he painted the portrait of his patron's successor Joseph, the brother of the Emperor Napoleon. A man who had lived through such crises, and had been such a close observer of them, had indeed material at his hand for satire. In the celebrated series known as 'Caprices,' there is not a type of evil, or malice, or weakness of humanity which is not held up to derision and contempt by Goya. The most flippant study of these works must make the least thoughtful feel that it is almost better for the happiness of the individual not to know too much about the hidden machinery behind those historical events, which are described with bald simplicity in the ordinary text-books. Goya would not tell pretty lies and he did not see pretty truths. He never modified

his view, and as he took a cynical view of humanity he displayed an absolute indifference in following the successful party always. As he held no official rank and no responsibility, he enjoyed all the privileges and escaped all the penalties inseparable from high rank or responsible professions. He attached himself without difficulty to persons of every class, and he placed his artistic skill as much at the service of the usurper of the throne of the Bourbons as he had to the Bourbons themselves. His great aim seems to have been to know, somehow, all that there was to know about humanity. For the rest, he had no scruple. He attempted to describe, in a series of most extraordinary works, history, religion, portraiture, and national morals. He had not Dante's religious feeling, and certainly not the inspiration which the great Italian found in that marvellous impulse given by a purely ideal first love. Goya said of himself that he had three masters in his life, Nature, Velasquez, and Rembrandt. In Nature he seemed to find, for the most part, ugliness, screams, exasperations, cruelty, and warfare. As an eminent French critic has said of him: "He can make you shudder but he cannot make you weep; he can interest you but he cannot get your heart." There is something almost revolting in his very ability to be able to sketch—whether from memory or on the scene—some of his terrible impres-

sions. He did not paint *con amore*, he was never in love with his subject. Even in his famous portraits of the Duchess of Alba there is a cruelty in the unsparing cleverness with which he has presented a being who, we feel somehow, is fascinating on rather a mean scale. Just as Dante lived under the inspiration of a very noble love, Goya worked under the inspiration of a very fashionable one. Beatrice was a lady of noble family, and the Duchess of Alba was a lady of noble family; but whereas one was a noble great lady, the other was a noble small lady. They were both considered beautiful, and they both died young; but whereas one must have been a woman of singularly tender and profound nature, the other was evidently frivolous, vain, restless, and dissatisfied—a true daughter of the eighteenth century, brought up under the influence of Rousseau and Voltaire.

And now I have come to the point I wish to bring forward and dwell upon. The genius of Goya was perfectly appropriate to the times in which he lived; he expressed them, and he expressed them with such power that in Spain to-day one still recognises constantly Goya faces, Goya attitudes—the world, in fact, which he represented, with amazing brilliancy and quickness, in his oil paintings and his water-colour sketches. I think every one will agree with me when I say that portraiture—whether in epic, or in drama, or in prose,

or in verse, or on canvas—is a way of seeing. When we go to a gallery of old or modern masters, and we have any acquaintance with art, we do not require to be told by whom the portraits have been painted. We know a Rembrandt and a Velasquez and a Titian, just as we recognize a Watts, a Frank Holl, or a Sargent of the present day. In literature we know the difference between a Shakespeare, a Thackeray, and a Dickens character—a George Eliot character and a George Meredith character. They are all true to the truths of psychology, but each master has his own way of seeing and conveying his impressions. Now in the State Gallery of Madrid one may see Goya's portraits of the family of Charles IV. He owed much to that family. They indulged him in every way ; they humoured him, they endured all his moods ; they permitted him—in a Court still famous for its rigid etiquette—astonishing freedoms. Well, one may imagine many artistic treatments of that family ; some of them might have been more flattering to the human race ; some might have been more decorative, from the point of view of those who are admirers of the Italian School ; but Goya's treatment of the Spanish Royal Family, while it may be what sentimentalists may describe as heartless, is absolutely sincere. Sincerity is, I think, an essential quality in portraiture, and to accuse any painter or literary artist of taking too

personal a view, or putting the mark of his own coinage on his own characters, is inadmissible criticism. If one were to follow the new advice given to artists of every kind by some of the newer school of critics, we should have the nose painted by one distinguished gentleman who was a nose specialist, and the ears by some other distinguished gentleman who made a study of ears, and the mouth by another distinguished gentleman who made a special study of the upper lip, and we should get a result after the style of the atrocious domestic property known in America as a "crazy quilt." It is a thing made of patches subscribed by every person who has a cutting to spare. The "crazy quilt" is, in fact, a monster; the impersonal work of art is a monster also. Where there is no individuality there is no force—where there is no force there is no truth.

Now if we consider the history of Goya's times, we must admit that no truthful man or woman could call it splendid. It was too violent to be squalid; the lamentation, bloodshed and woe of that period would seem almost incredible to those who live in England to-day; the immorality, the irreligion, the selfishness, the cruelty and the power permitted to those who had either fortune or audacity or rank, or all three, cannot be described by us at this distance; but they were immortally described by Goya.

any amount of success, or money, or popularity, into telling lies or acting them. Here he resembled Dante. Here, too, he resembled Voltaire. Here, too, he resembled every man who ever made any mark on his own or later generations. Let him be mistaken, let him be prejudiced, let him see too much joy or too much gloom, or too much sorrow, or too little hope, or too little security, so long as he doesn't lie. Had Goya lived in England to-day he would certainly not have shown us women being butchered in the streets, men being dreadfully tortured, or prisoners groaning in chains. The horror is *not* that he saw them, *but* that there were such sights to be seen. The final comment on his labours may be found in the one calm and consoling phrase he ever published. It is written under a sketch which represents four women sleeping shut up in a dark attic: "Do not wake them; sleep is often the one good to the sorrowful." The man who wrote that was one who had paid the full price for his knowledge. He must have gone down into the depths and earned the right to speak of suffering in his own terms.

Goya's terms were not Dante's terms, though Dante lashed his own age with the keenest invective ever uttered in literature. Goya's terms were not the terms of Titian, or of Gainsborough, or of Rembrandt, or of Velasquez, or of Shakespeare, or of Goethe,

or of Balzac, or of Disraeli, or of Thackeray, or of George Meredith. But he, as they, expresses the mood and the spirit of his own generation ; he, wiser than many men of genius, never allowed himself to be tied down to any one set. The whole world was his country, and while he knew Courts, he also knew farmyards, and while he could paint queens, he could also paint drudges. This is why I call him a supreme master of portraiture—he has not given us a few acquaintances, he has given us a whole people ; he has not given us a class—he has given us *civilised* Europe in the eighteenth century. The gift may not be comforting ; some of us may yearn for a few touches of false sentiment, a little balderdash, in fact. Balderdash, however, has no vitality. If Goya had given us balderdash we should never have heard of him—and he still lives—not because he was witty or clever, or wild, or dashing, or agreeable, or was loved by a duchess ; but because he was truthful. He painted the truth.

## BEATRICE

A LECTURE BY LUIGI RICCI; READ AT THE  
MEETING OF THE DANTE SOCIETY, HELD AT  
THE PFEIFFER HALL, 45, HARLEY STREET,  
LONDON, APRIL 29TH, 1903, BEFORE H.R.H.  
PRINCESS LOUISE AUGUSTA OF SCHLESWIG-  
HOLSTEIN. F. D. MOCATTA IN THE CHAIR.

THE genius of Dante has raised Beatrice to such a height that several of his later commentators have not been afraid to assert that Beatrice never had any real existence, and was only the creature of Dante's imagination. I say later commentators, because up to the end of the fifteenth century no one had put forward such a preposterous idea. Boccaccio, the earliest of Dante's commentators, appointed by the Florentine Republic to explain the poem to the people in public lectures, who was a boy when Dante died, and was a friend of Dante's nephew, and had personally known many people who had known Dante, and all the earliest commentators, l' Ottimo, Leonardo Bruni, Giovanni Villani, Manetti, Benvenuto da Imola, never doubted the existence of Beatrice. More than two hundred years after Dante's death, a certain Filelfo started this strange assertion, and several later commentators

have repeated it on no greater authority than their own assertion. Some of them have said that Beatrice was Theology, some stated that it represented the Roman Empire, others Science, others Philosophy, others Wisdom. Perez asserted that Beatrice was Active Intelligence ; Galanti that she was Divine Revelation, and so on. Gietmann says that Beatrice represents the Church, as if the Church had been born eight months after Dante, and had died in the year 1290. All these commentators seem to have been inspired by the thought of their own self-importance ; and rather than find Beatrice in Dante's works they have sought her in their own imagination. The study of a great poet implies of a necessity the complete effacement of the student, and any self-assertion of personal authority in the student is disastrous to the right understanding of a great poetical work.

To know a good commentator one should apply the same test that another great Italian suggested to a king for knowing a good minister. Machiavelli says in his *Prince*\* : " When you see the minister think more of himself than of you, and in all his actions seek his own advantage, such a man will never be a good minister, and you can never rely on him."

\* *The World's Classics*, No. XLIII.—*The Prince*, by Niccold Machiavelli. Translated into English by Luigi Ricci. (London : Grant Richards, 1908.) P. 98.

Leaving aside all these imaginary Beatrices, I shall ask you to read with me in Dante everything that he has said of her. In this way you will not only become acquainted with the real Beatrice—Dante's Beatrice—but you will also, as a matter of course, see by yourselves the mistake of those who sought her elsewhere than in Dante's own works.

But before reading what Dante said of Beatrice, I shall mention a few historical dates concerning her. In the thirteenth century there was in Florence the powerful and wealthy family of Portinari, whose palace stood about fifty yards from the house of the Alighieri. These lived between San Martino and Santa Margherita, and the Portinari had their palace where now is the Palace Riccardi, at the end of the Corso, near the corner of Pazzi. The Portinari had come to Florence from Fiesole, and they are mentioned as far back as the year 1187. The family lasted as late as the year 1772. Beatrice was born in April, 1266, the daughter of Folco Portinari and of Gilia Capponsacchi. From the will written by Folco, on January 15th, 1287, we learn that Beatrice had at that date married Simone de' Bardi. "Item dominæ Bici filiæ meæ, et uxori domini Simonis de Bardis reliqui libr. 50, ad floren."

The date of her death was June 9th, 1290, when she was only twenty-four years and two months old. As we see, Dante did

not marry Beatrice, whom he loved so much; and this was given by a certain commentator, better known for the flights of his imagination than for historical accuracy, as an evident reason why Beatrice was not a woman, but only "Philosophy." But does every man marry the woman whom he would like to marry? To state this commonplace truth is the best confutation of this so-called proof; but in the case of Dante there was also the fact that the Portinari family was in social standing far above that of the Alighieri. The immense wealth of the former allowed the father of Beatrice to found the great hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence, and the Bardi family, in which she married, was one of the wealthiest of those times, having a branch of their bank even in London.

Boccaccio relates in the following words the first meeting of Dante and Beatrice: "At the time when the mildness of the season, the variety of the flowers, the budding of the new foliage makes the earth smiling, it was the custom of our city for men and women to meet in festive assemblies. Generally the richest inhabitant of a 'contrada,' or street, or parish, invited all the others in the neighbourhood. On such an occasion Dante visited with his father the house of the Portinari, when he was only nine years old, and there he for the first time saw Beatrice, who then was only eight years and one month old. She

was charming and beautiful, gentle and pleasing, modest and serious, far above her tender age. The features of her face were delicate and well proportioned, and, besides being beautiful, full of such charm that she looked like a little angel. And Dante, though still a child, received her image in his heart so that, from that day forth, she dwelt always there." Of her beauty, Benvenuto da Imola wrote that she was a girl *miræ pulchritudinis, et majoris honestatis*. But far better than the testimony of biographers, chroniclers, and commentators, is what Dante himself says of his Beatrice; and instead of searching for her elsewhere, I shall point out nearly everything that Dante says of Beatrice in his own works. Without following a chronological order, I shall mention what he says of her in the *Convito*, in the *De Vulgari Eloquio*, in the *Canzoniere*, in the *Vita Nuova*, and in the *Divina Commedia*.

In the second chapter of the second book of the *Convito*, he says: "The Star of Venus had twice completed that revolution within her circle which makes her appear as the Evening Star, and as the Morning Star at the proper seasons.....since the date of the death of that Beatrice Beata, who now lives in Heaven with the Angels, and on Earth in my Heart."

Again, in the ninth chapter: "I believe, and I affirm, and I am sure of passing from this into another and better life, where that

glorious Lady lives, with whom my Soul is still in love"; and in the seventh chapter of the third book: "This Lady was as praised for the beauty of her Soul as for that of her body.....The sweetness of her speech created in the mind of those who heard it thoughts of love."

In the *Canzoniere*, in the third sestina, Dante says: "Love sometimes leads me to meet ladies, among whom there is one who dwells within my heart as the most beautiful of them all"; and in the fourteenth canzone : "I feel so much the power of Love that I am not able to bear it long without complaining.....Love from those beautiful eyes comes within my loving ones, and carries into them sweetness. It is real love that has become my Master."

In the twenty-sixth sonnet, Dante says: "Who can look without fear into the eyes of this beautiful Child ?"

Here is the twenty-ninth Sonnet:—

Last All-Saints' day I had a vision gay  
Of ladies, whom I saw in bright array ;  
And one of them came onward like the Spring,  
Accompanied by Love on gentle wing.

From out her eyes there shot a beam so bright,  
That it appeared just like a fiery sprite ;  
And I had such desire, that, gazing in her face,  
I saw a figure of angelic grace.

Him who was worthy she with health did dower  
From those same eyes so mild and sweet,  
Fulfilling each one's heart with strength and  
power.

I think she took her birth from Heaven on high,  
And downward came to Earth to guide our feet.  
Blest then is he who to her standeth nigh.

In the thirty-second Sonnet :—

Guido, I would that thou and I, and Lapo too,  
Were carried by some sweet enchantment so,  
That placed within a ship  
Which o'er the main should dance and skip,  
We'd fly where'er we had a mind,  
Impelled by favouring wind.

I'll chance nor any boisterous gale  
Should check us ; but we'd onward sail.  
So living day by day in one consent  
Our very joy should grow e'en in content.

The wizard king within our bark would place  
Thy lady Vanna, and for me my Beatrice blest,  
With her who of the thirty fair completes my list.  
The theme of Love would ever form our lays,  
And every lady fair would live in sweet content ;  
And so, I think, should we where'er we went.

In the thirty-sixth Sonnet. he says : “ I have been in love since my ninth year.”

In the sixth Ballata, he makes Beatrice say : “ I am a beautiful and young child come to this world to show myself to you.”

In the *De Vulgari Eloquio*, in the first sestina : “ Neither hill, nor wall, nor green trees can hide her beautiful face from me. ....I have seen her dressed in green, such as to personify that love which I feel for the very shadow cast by her.”

Then in the second sestina, Dante addresses Love, thus : “ O Love, you see quite well how this lady became aware that she is my Love, by my countenance in

which you shine. From her eyes come to me that sweet Light, that makes me love only this lady."

In the *Vita Nuova*,\* written about 1292, within two years of Beatrice's death, he relates in full his love for her. The truthfulness of his confession is self-evident, and the description of all his feelings in their different stages of fear and hope, anxiety and expectation, humility and pride, are described by a master-hand, which renders this little book so universally interesting, and so easily understood by all those whose gentle heart is ruled by Love.

"Already nine times, since my birth, had the sun returned to the same point, according to its revolution, when the gracious lady first appeared to my eyes, who was called Beatrice even by those who did not know her name.

"She appeared to me almost at the beginning of her ninth year, and I saw her almost at the end of my ninth year. She appeared to me dressed in modest and becoming attire of the finest crimson colour, girted and adorned in the fashion best suited to her tender age.

"I began to tremble so much, that this trembling showed itself fearfully in the throbings of the smallest of my veins, and tremblingly said these words: 'Behold a God stronger than I, who comes to master me.'

\* *The New Life*, Italian text with English translation, by Luigi Ricci. (Kegan Paul.) Leather gilt, 8/6.

"Your happiness has now appeared."

"From that time forth I say that Love ruled my soul which was immediately joined to him; he began to exercise over me such assurance and such mastery through the power given him by imagination, that I was obliged to do entirely whatever he wished.

"Many times he ordered me to seek and see this very youthful angel; wherefore in my childhood many times I went about looking for her; and I saw her of such noble and so admirable mien that surely of her could be said those words of the poet Homer: 'She does not seem a daughter of mortal man, but of God.'

"After so many days had sped, totalling years nine, since the erewhile described vision of that right peerless one, it befell that this noteworthy lady appeared, in white vesture garbed, between two noble dames of older age; and, while wending on her way she turned her glance towards that spot where I stood all trembling with emotion, and through her courtesy benign, which now is duly rewarded in the other life, vouchsafed me greeting with a worthiness such that it seemed to me thereupon to catch sight of the bounds far-off of bliss.

"The hour when reached me her right gracious salutation was exactly the ninth of the day, and inasmuch as it was the first time her words came quickened so as to reach my ears, such delight did I experi-

ence that, as one intoxicated, I broke off from my fellows, and betook me to the solitude of my chamber, and set myself to bethink me of this most gracious being."

Then, when in his eighteenth year, Dante wrote his first Sonnet, beginning :—

A ciascun' alma presa e gentil core,  
To each kind heart and soul whom Love doth move,

To which his friend Guido replies :—

Vedesti al mio parere ogni valore.  
Thou hast, I deem, beheld aright full worth.

"I fell in a short time into such a frail and helpless condition, that friends sorrowed as they looked upon me, and many full of envy endeavoured to find out that which I above all things wished to conceal from others. And I, perceiving their malicious inquiries, for the sake of Love which commanded me, according to the counsel of reason, answered them, that Love was that thing which had conquered me thus. I said Love, because I bore upon my countenance so many of its traces, that it was impossible to hide it. But when they asked me, 'Through whom hath this love played such havoc with thee,' I smiling looked upon them, and held my peace.

"It happened that this most gracious lady one day was seated in a place where words about the Queen of Glory were said, and I was in a position from which I could see my bliss."

Dante wishes to screen his love for Beatrice by making believe that he loves another lady.

"By means of this lady I kept my secret hidden for months and years, and to make believe this still more, I wrote for her some poetical trifles, which it is not my purpose to transcribe here.

"I say that when she appeared anywhere, because of the hope of the wonderful salutation, I had no longer an enemy, and, moreover, a flame of Charity blazed within me, which made me forgive any one who had offended me; and whosoever at that moment should have asked me for anything, my answer, in a countenance full of humility, would have been only: 'Love.' And when she was near to salute me, a spirit of Love, obliterating all other feelings, drove forth my downcast eyes, saying to them: 'Go, pay homage to your Lady.' And any one, who had wished to recognize Love, would have been able to do it by seeing the quivering of my eyes.

"So that it is manifestly apparent that in her salutation dwelt all my happiness.

"After the struggle of different thoughts, there happened that this most gracious lady came to a place where many gentle ladies were assembled; to which place I was brought by a friend, who thought that he would do me a great favour to take me where so many beautiful women were to be seen.

"And thus, thinking to oblige my friend, I proposed to remain with him attending on those ladies. Having decided to do this, I felt a great trembling on the left side of my breast, which spread to all the limbs of my body. Then, I say, I leant my body against the painted wall of this mansion, and fearing lest others had observed my trembling, I raised my eyes, and looking at the ladies I saw among them the most gracious Beatrice.

"My aspect had betrayed to many the secret of my heart, and certain women who had assembled together, delighting in each other's company, had well divined my feelings, each having often witnessed my discomfiture. Passing near them, as if by fortune led, I was called by one of the gracious ladies, and she who called me was endowed with a most gracious gift of speech. Having reached them, and perceiving my gracious lady to be absent, I felt reassured, and saluting, asked the ladies what might be their pleasure. Of them there were many, some laughing, some gazing at me in expectation of what I might be about to say. One lady, from a group engaged in talk, turned her eyes upon me, and, addressing me by name, uttered these words:—'To what purpose lovest thou this thy lady, since thou canst not sustain her presence? Tell us, for of a truth the purpose of such love must be quite new.' Having said these words, not

she alone, but all the others present awaited my response. Then I answered with these words : ‘Ladies, the aim and purpose of my love was but the hope of greeting from the lady ; in that dwelt happiness, the end and aim of all my desire.’” And on this occasion he wrote the beautiful canzone :—

Donne, ch’ avete intelletto d’ amore.

Ladies, who have intelligence of Love.

“After my song had gained some publicity, a friend who heard it asked me to tell him what is Love.”

Hear Dante’s answer :—

Amore e cor gentil sono una cosa.

Love and a gentle heart both are as one.

“Since I treated of Love in the last sonnet, there came unto me the wish to write also words of praise of this most gracious Lady :—

Negli occhi porta la mia donna Amore.

Within her eyes my lady carries Love.

“Not many days after this (as it pleased the glorious Lord, Who Himself suffered death) he, who had been the father of such a wonder, as could be seen that that most noble Beatrice was, leaving this life went truly to eternal glory.

“And as, according to the custom of the above-mentioned city, women foregather with women, and men with men, at such a mournful event, many women foregathered there, where this Beatrice was piteously

weeping ; so that, seeing women returning from her house, I heard words about this most gracious Lady, and how she was bewailing. Among such words I heard them saying : ‘Really she cries so that whoever saw her would die of pity.’

“ This most gentle Lady, of whom I have just been treating, was held in such high esteem by all that, when she passed along the road, people ran to gaze upon her ; and thereat I felt marvellous gladness of heart. And when she was nigh to any one, such modesty filled his heart, that he did not dare raise his eyes or even return her greeting ; and to this many who have had experience of it could bear testimony to any one who might doubt my word. She went on her way crowned and clothed in humility, displaying no vain-gloriousness at what she saw and heard. Men said, when she had passed by : ‘ This is no mere woman, but one of the most lovely angels from Heaven.’ And others said : ‘ This is a marvellous creature, blessed be the Lord who can work so wondrously.’

Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare  
La donna mia, quand’ ella altrui saluta  
Ch’ ogni lingua divien tremando muta.  
So gentle and so meek she doth appear,  
This Lady mine, when men she doth salute,  
That every tongue doth tremble and grows mute.

“ I say this my Lady became in such favour that, not only she was honoured and praised, but many ladies were honoured

and praised for her sake. Therefore I, observing this, and wishing to point it out to those who did not see it, decided to write words in which this should be expressed, and I wrote this sonnet :—

Vede perfettamente ogni salute  
Chi la mia donna tra le donne vede."

He perfectly all blessedness doth view  
Who amid others sees my Lady sweet.

Then Beatrice dies on June 9th, 1290—as every woman and every man must die—another proof, if it were needed, that she was not an idea, or Philosophy, or Divine Revelation, or any other abstraction. The sorrow and the misery in which Dante was plunged were such that he gives vent to his feelings with the words of the Bible :—

"How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! She is become as a widow, she that was great among the nations!"

"After my eyes had wept a long while, and were so worn out that I could not give vent to my grief, I thought of unburdening it with doleful words, and therefore I decided to write a song in which I, weeping, would speak of her, on whose account such a great sorrow had become the destroyer of my spirit."

Then Beatrice's brother asks Dante to write of her death :—"There came to me one who, according to the degrees of friendship, ranks immediately after my first

friend ; and he was so near of kin to this glorious Lady that no one else was nearer to her. And after we had begun to talk together, he prayed me to compose something in honour of a lady who had died ; and he disguised his words so that it might seem that he was speaking of another lady, who had died a short time before. And so when I perceived that he was really speaking solely with reference to that blessed Lady, I said that I would do what his prayer desired of me." And Dante wrote :—

Venite a intender li sospiri miei,  
O cor gentili, chè pietà il desia.

Ye gentle souls, of your sweet charity  
(For 'tis love's due), come hearken to my sighs.

"On that day, when the year was fulfilled that this lady had been made a citizen of eternal life, I was sitting in a place where, thinking of her, I was drawing an angel upon some panel ; and while I was drawing I turned my eyes and saw men beside me, whom it was fitting to honour. They were looking at that which I was doing, and according to what was told me afterwards, they had been there some time before I perceived them. When I saw them I rose, and, saluting them, said, 'Another was just then with me, wherefore I was in thought.' Whereupon, when they had departed, I returned to my work—that is, the drawing figures of angels. While I was doing this, the thought came to me to

make a poem as for her anniversary, and to address it to those honourable ones who had been with me."

And later on :—" It happened that pilgrims were passing by the street that almost crosses the middle of the city where the most gracious Lady was born, lived, and died"; and Dante informs even those strangers of the death of his Lady.

" Soon after I wrote this Sonnet there appeared to me a marvellous vision, in which I saw things that brought me to the resolution not to say more of this blessed Lady until I could treat of her more worthily. And to attain that end I study my best as far as in me lies, as she herself doth know of a truth. So that, if it shall please Him, by whom all things live, to prolong my life a few years, I hope to say of her that which hath never been said of any one."

Here, in the last chapter of his *New Life*, we see how Dante was planning the great poem in which his Beatrice would be exalted and glorified to the utmost power of his genius, and far above any other woman. In the *Divina Commedia* we shall, therefore, seek for further evidence about her; and although Beatrice in her glory is endowed with gifts superior to those of any earthly woman, yet she is still his Beatrice, who was born, and lived, and loved, and died in her native Florence.

Let us now read what Dante says of Beatrice in the *Divina Commedia*.

In the great poem, Beatrice sends Virgil to help Dante out of the *selva selvaggia*, and guide him in his dangerous journey through the kingdoms of the dead, till Dante shall once more meet her in the Earthly Paradise, whence she will lead him to the glory of Heaven, where, at the end of the poem, she resumes her place among the Blessed.

The first mention of Beatrice is in the second canto of the *Inferno*, when Virgil, to encourage Dante on his journey, tells him :—

Io era tra color che son sospesi,  
E donna mi chiamò beata e bella  
Tanto che di parlare io la richiesi.

Lucevan gli occhi suoi più della stella,  
E cominciommi a dir soave e piana  
Con angelica voce in sua favella :

Among those was I who are in suspense,  
And a fair, saintly Lady called to me  
In such wise, I besought her to command me.

Her eyes were shining brighter than the Star  
And she began to say, gentle and low,  
With voice angelical, in her own language :

Io son Beatrice che ti faccio andare,  
Vengo di loco ove tornar disio,  
Amor mi mosse che mi fa parlare.

Beatrice am I who do bid thee to go,  
I come from there, where I would fain return,  
Love moved me, which compelleth me to speak.

O Donna di virtù, sola per cui  
 L' umana specie eccede ogni contento  
 Da quel ciel, che ha minor li cerchi sui.

O Lady of virtue, thou alone through whom  
 The human race enjoys all happiness  
 Within that heaven that has the lesser circles.

L'amico mio e non della ventura.

My dearest friend, not a fair weather friend.

.....Beatrice, loda di Dio vera,  
 Chè non soccorri quei che t' amò tanto,  
 Che uscio per te dalla volagre schiera ?

Beatrice.....the true praise of God,  
 Why succourest thou not him, who loved thee so?  
 For thee he issued from the vulgar herd.

After Farinata had foretold to Dante his  
 exile, Virgil cheers him with the words :—

Quando sarai dinanzi al dolce raggio  
 Di quella, il cui bell' occhio tutto vede,  
 Da lei saprai di tua vita il viaggio.

When thou shalt be before the radiance sweet  
 Of her, whose beauteous eyes all things behold,  
 From her thou'l know the journey of thy life.

Having heard from Brunetto Latini, his  
 old teacher, of the fame that is in store for  
 him, Dante says :—

Ciò che narrate di mio corso scrivo,  
 E serbolo a chiosar con altro testo  
 A Donna che 'l saprà, se a lei arrivo.

What you narrate of my career I write,  
 And keep it to be glossed with other text  
 By a Lady, who can do it, if I reach her.

Beatrice is never referred to by name in  
 the *Inferno*, except in the two cases above

mentioned, when Dante and Virgil had not yet entered Hell ; as it would have undoubtedly seemed a profanation to do so in that horrible abode of woes. In the sixth canto of *Purgatorio*, Virgil refers Dante to Beatrice for the solution of a difficult question, thus :—

Veramente a così alto sospetto  
Non ti fermar, se quella nol ti dice,  
Che luce fia tra il vero e l'intelletto.

Non so se intendi ; dico di Beatrice :  
Tu la vedrai di sopra, in sulla vetta  
Di questo monte, ridente e felice.

Verily, in so deep a questioning  
Do not decide, unless she tell it thee,  
Who light 'twixt truth and intellect shall be.

I know not if thou understand ; I speak  
Of Beatrice ; her shalt thou see above,  
Smiling and happy, on this mountain's top.

The same idea is repeated further on, when Virgil says :—

E se la mia ragion non ti disfama  
Vedrai Beatrice, ed ella pienamente  
Ti torrà questa e ciascun' altra brama.

And if my reasoning appease thee not  
Thou shalt see Beatrice ; and she will fully  
Take from thee this and every other longing.

Once more, in the eighteenth canto, Virgil says the same thing :—

.....Quanto ragion qui vede  
Dirti poss' io ; da indi in là t' aspetta  
Pure a Beatrice.....

.....What reason sees here,  
Myself can tell thee ; beyond that await  
For Beatrice.....

When before the wall of fire, which  
Dante is afraid of crossing, Virgil per-  
suades him to enter it by saying :—

Or vedi, figlio,  
Tra Beatrice e te è questo muro.....  
Mi volsi al savio Duca udendo il nome  
Che nella mente sempre mi ragiona.

Now look thou, Son,  
'Twixt Beatrice and thee there is this wall.....  
I turned to my wise guide, hearing the name  
That in my memory evermore is welling.

Lo dolce Padre mio per confortarmi  
Pur di Beatrice ragionando andava,  
Dicendo : Gli occhi suoi già veder parmi.

And my sweet Father, to encourage me,  
Discoursing still of Beatrice went on,  
Saying : Her eyes I seem to see already.....

In the Earthly Paradise Dante describes  
thus his meeting with Beatrice :—

.....Dentro una nuvola di fiori,  
Che dalle mani angeliche saliva  
E ricadeva in giù dentro e di fuori,

Sopra candido vel, cinta d' uliva,  
Donna m' apparve sotto verde manto,  
Vestita di color di fiamma viva.

E lo spirito mio che già cotanto  
Tempo era stato, che alla sua presenza  
Non era di stupor tremando affranto,

Senza dagli occhi aver più conoscenza  
Per occulta virtù, che da lei mosse,  
D' antico amor sentì la gran potenza

Tosto che nella vista mi percosse  
L' alta virtù, che già m' avea trafitto  
Prima ch' io fuor di puerizia fosse.....

Conosco i segni dell' antica fiamma.

.....In the bosom of a cloud of flowers  
Which from those hands angelical ascended,  
And downwards fell again inside and out,

Over her snow-white veil with olive cinct  
Appeared a Lady under a green mantle,  
Vested in colour of the living flame.

And my own spirit, that already now  
So long a time had been, that in her presence  
Trembling with awe it had not stood abashed,

Without more knowledge having by mine  
eyes,  
Through occult virtue that from her proceeded  
Of ancient love the mighty influence felt.....  
I know the traces of the ancient flame.

Here I shall take the liberty of becoming  
a commentator on my own account, by  
pointing out the "snow-white veil," the  
"green mantle," and the dress the colour of  
the "living flame"—green, white, and red,  
the three colours of the Italian flag, that  
flag which this very day is waving throughout  
the whole Italian kingdom, side by  
side with the glorious flag of England.

Guardami ben, ben son, ben son Beatrice.  
Look at me well ; in sooth I am Beatrice.

Then Beatrice speaks of Dante to the  
angels :—

Questi fu tal nella sua *vita nuova*  
Virtualmente, che ogni abito destro  
Fatto avrebbe in lui mirabil prova.

Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto,  
Mostrando gli occhi giovinetti a lui  
Meco il menava in dritta parte volto ;

Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui  
 Di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,  
 Questi si tolse a me e diessi altrui.

Quando di carne a spirto era salita,  
 E bellezza e virtù cresciuta m' era,  
 Fui io a lui men cara e men gradita.

Such had this man become in his *new life*  
 Potentially, that every righteous habit  
 Would have made admirable proof in him.

Some time did I sustain him with my look,  
 Revealing unto him my youthful eyes  
 I led him with me turned in the right way.

As soon as ever of my second age  
 I was upon the threshold and changed life,  
 Himself from me he took and gave to others.

When from the flesh to spirit I ascended,  
 And beauty and virtue were in me increased,  
 I was to him less dear and less delightful.

.....Quali agevolezze o quali avanzi  
 Nella fronte delle altre si mostraro  
 Perchè dovessi lor *passeggiar* anzi ?

.....What allurements or what vantages  
 Upon the forehead of the others showed  
 That thou shouldst turn thy footsteps unto  
 them ?

Here the word *passeggiar* refers to the custom still prevailing in the provinces in Italy where the swain can only have a distant glance of the lady he loves, when she is at her window, and he is obliged to walk many times up and down the street before her house to obtain this problematical boon.

Mai non t' appresentò natura od arte  
 Piacer quanto le mie belle membra, in ch' ie  
 Rinchiusa fui, e che or son terra sparte.

E se il sommo piacer sì ti fallio  
 Per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale  
 Dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio ?

Never to thee presented art or nature  
 Pleasure so great as the fair limbs wherein  
 I was enclosed, which scattered are in earth.

And if the highest pleasure thus did fail thee  
 By reason of my death, what mortal thing  
 Should then have drawn thee into its desire ?

Observe the *mie belle membra*, in which  
 the soul of Beatrice now speaking *rinchiusa fui* during her life on earth.

Then the handmaids of Beatrice plead  
 thus with her to forgive Dante :—

“ Volgi, Beatrice, volgi gli occhi santi,”  
 Era la lor canzone, “ al tuo fedele,  
 Che per vederti ha mossi passi tanti.”

“ Turn, Beatrice, turn thy holy eyes”—  
 Such was their song—“ unto thy faithful one,  
 Who has to see thee ta'en so many steps.”

Ascending to Paradise with Beatrice, Dante shows in this last part of his poem the sublimity of his love for the woman whom he so dearly loved on earth, and whom he worships in heaven. Uplifted by his love, he says :—

S' io era sol di me quel che creasti  
 Novellamente, Amor, che il ciel governi,  
 Tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume mi levasti.

If I was merely what of me thou newly  
 Createdst, Love, who governest the heaven,  
 Thou knowest, who didst lift me with thy light.

Quel Sol, che pria d'amor mi scaldò il petto.

That Sun, which erst with love my bosom  
 warmed.

Beatrice mi guardò con gli occhi pieni  
Di faville d' amor, così divini.....

Beatrice gazed upon me with her eyes  
Full of the sparks of love, and so divine.....

In his journey through the heavens with Beatrice, Dante sees her becoming more and more ethereally beautiful, the higher they ascend and the nearer to God they approach :—

Così corremmo nel secondo regno.  
Quivi la Donna mia vid' io sì lieta,  
Come nel lume di quel Ciel si mise,  
Che più lucente se ne fe' il pianeta.

So did we speed into the second realm.  
My Lady there so joyful I beheld,  
As into the brightness of that Heaven she entered,  
More luminous thereat the planet grew.

.....La mia Donna,  
Che mi disseta con le dolci stille.

.....My Lady,  
Who slakes my thirst with her sweet effluences.

.....Raggiandomi d' un riso  
Tal che nel fuoco faria l'uom felice.

.....Lighting me with a smile  
Such as would make one happy in the fire.

And again, when Dante and Beatrice enter the Heaven of Venus, he says of her :—

Io non m' accorsi del salire in ella ;  
Ma d' esservi entro mi fece assai fede  
La Donna mia, ch' io vidi far più bella.

I was not ware of our ascending to it ;  
But of our being in it gave full faith  
My Lady, whom I saw more beauteous grow.

Only one love was greater in Dante than his love for Beatrice—his love of God, as he so well says in the tenth canto of *Paradiso* :—

E sì tutto il mio amore in Lui si mise,  
Che Beatrice ecclissò nell' oblio.

And all my love was so absorbed in Him,  
That in oblivion Beatrice was eclipsed.

Further on, Dante writes of his beloved :—

.....Beatrice sì bella e ridente  
Mi si mostrò, che tra quelle vedute  
Si vuol lasciar che non seguir la mente.  
.....Beatrice so beautiful and smiling  
Appeared to me, that with the other sights  
That followed not my memory I must leave her.

.....Dentro agli occhi suoi ardeva un riso  
Tal, ch'io pensai co' miei toccar lo fondo  
Della mia grazia e del mio Paradiso.

.....In her eyes was burning such a smile  
That with my own methought I touched the  
bottom  
Both of my grace and of my Paradise.

Again, in the eighteenth canto, Beatrice is always the woman whom Dante loved :—

Quella Donna, che a Dio mi menava.  
.....The Lady, who to God was leading me.  
Vincendo me col lume d'un sorriso,  
Ella mi disse ; "Volgiti ed ascolta,  
Chè non pur ne' miei occhi è Paradiso."

Conquering me with the radiance of a smile  
She said to me : "Turn thee about and listen,  
Not in mine eyes alone is Paradise."

Io mi rivolsi dal mio destro lato  
Per vedere in Beatrice il mio dovere,  
O per parlare o per atto segnato ;

E vidi le sue luci tanto mere,  
 Tanto gioconde, che la sua sembianza  
 Vinceva gli altri e l'ultimo solere.

To my right side I turned myself around,  
 My duty to behold in Beatrice  
 Either by words or gesture signified ;

And so translucent I beheld her eyes,  
 So full of pleasure, that her countenance  
 Surpassed its other and its latest wont.

Già eran gli occhi miei rifissi al volto  
 Della mia Donna, e l'animo con essi,  
 E da ogni altro intento s'era tolto ;

E quella non ridea ma : " S' io ridessi,  
 Mi cominciò, tu ti faresti quale  
 Fu Semelè, quando di cener fessi,

Chè la bellezza mia, che per le scale  
 Dell' eterno palazzo più s'accende,  
 Com'hai veduto, quanto più si sale,

Se non si temperasse, tanto splende,  
 Che il tuo mortal potere al suo folgore  
 Sarebbe fronda che tuono scoscende."

Already on my Lady's face mine eyes  
 Again were fastened, and with these my mind,  
 And from all other purpose was withdrawn ;

And she smiled not, but " If I were to smile,"  
 She unto me began, " thou wouldest become  
 Like Semele, when she was turned to ashes.

Because my beauty, that along the stairs  
 Of the eternal palace more enkindles,  
 As thou hast seen, the farther we ascend,

If it were tempered not, is so resplendent  
 That all thy mortal power in its effulgence  
 Would seem a leaflet that the thunder crushes."

Oppresso di stupore alla mia guida  
 Mi volsi, come parvol che ricorre  
 Sempre colà dove più si confida :

E quella, come madre che soccorre  
 Subito al figlio pallido ed anelo  
 Con la sua voce che il suol ben disporre,  
 Mi disse : " Non sai tu che tu sei in cielo ?  
 E non sai tu che il cielo è tutto santo,  
 E ciò che ci si fa vien da buon zelo ? "

Oppressed with stupor, I unto my guide  
 Turned like a little child who always runs  
 For refuge there where he confideth most :

And she, even as a mother who straightway  
 Gives comfort to her pale and breathless boy,  
 With voice whose wont is to reassure him,

Said to me : " Knowest thou not that thou  
 art in heaven ?  
 And knowest thou not that heaven is holy all,  
 And what is done here cometh from good zeal ? "

Higher and higher they soar in the  
 heavens, and greater and greater becomes  
 Beatrice's ethereal beauty :—

Pareami che il suo viso ardesse tutto,  
 E gli occhi avea di letizia sì pieni,  
 Che passar mi convien senza costrutto.

It seemed to me her face was all aflame,  
 And eyes she had so full of ecstasy,  
 That I must needs pass on without describing.

O Beatrice, dolce guida e cara.

O Beatrice, thou gentle guide and dear.

Strengthened by the sight of Christ and  
 of Mary, Dante's eyes can now behold in  
 its full splendour the heavenly beauty of  
 Beatrice, who says to him :—

" Apri gli occhi e riguarda qual son io ;  
 Tu hai vedute cose, che possente  
 Sei fatto a sostener lo riso mio."

"Open thine eyes and look at what I am ;  
 Thou hast beheld such things, that strong enough  
 Hast thou become to tolerate my smile."

And here, however much I may admire Longfellow's poetical translation, I cannot help comparing to its disadvantage Dante's original *sostener lo riso mio* with his "tolerate my smile." Another proof, were a proof wanting, that no translation can ever compare with the original ; though not all translators deserve the cruel Italian proverb : *Traduttori, Traditori.*

Dante, at the sight of his glorified Beatrice, which recalls vividly to his mind the real Florentine Beatrice, feels the utter impossibility of describing her, even "if all the tongues of the Muses aided him," and he says that :—

.....Al millesmo del vero  
 Non si verria, cantando il santo riso,  
 E quanto il santo aspetto facea mero."

.....To a thousandth of the truth  
 It would not reach, singing the holy smile,  
 And how the holy aspect it illumed.

Seeing Dante entranced in the admiration of her beauty, Beatrice recalls him to a higher duty, by saying :—

"Perchè la faccia mia sì t'innamora  
 Che tu non ti rivolgi al bel giardino,  
 Che sotto i raggi di Cristo s'infiora ?

Quivi è la Rosa, in che il Verbo divino  
 Carne si fece ; e quivi son li gigli,  
 Al cui odor si prese il buon cammino."

"Why doth my face so much enamour thee,  
That to the garden fair thou turnest not,  
Which under the rays of Christ is blossoming ?

There is the Rose, in which the Word divine  
Became incarnate ; there the lilies are  
By whose perfume the good way was dis-  
covered."

The poet then beholds the glorification  
of Mary, and describes in the most sublime  
way the love of the Saints for her with the  
following words :—

E come fantolin, che inver la mamma  
Tende le braccia, poi che il latte prese,  
Per l'animo che infin di fuor s'infiamma,

Ciascun di quei candori in su si stese  
Con la sua cima, sì che l'alto affetto,  
Ch'egli aveano a Maria mi fu palese.

And as a little child, that towards its mother  
Stretches its arms, when it the milk has taken,  
Through impulse kindled into outward flame,

Each of these gleams of whiteness upward  
reached  
So with its summit, that the deep affection  
They had for Mary was revealed to me.

The twenty-fourth canto opens with  
Beatrice's prayer to the Saints, entreating  
them to examine Dante about his Faith,  
his Hope, and his Charity :—

"O Sodalizio eletto alla gran cena  
Del benedetto Agnello, il qual vi ciba  
Sì che la vostra voglia è sempre piena,

Se per grazia di Dio questi preliba  
Di quel che cade della vostra mensa,  
Anzi che morte tempo gli prescriba,

Ponete mente alla sua voglia immensa,  
 E roratelo alquanto : voi bevete  
 Sempre del fonte onde vien quel ch' ei pensa."

" O company elect to the great supper  
 Of the Lamb benedight, who feedeth you  
 So that for ever full is your desire,

If by the grace of God this man foretaste  
 Something of that which falleth from your  
 table,  
 Or ever death prescribe to him the time,

Direct your mind to his immense desire,  
 And him somewhat bedew ; you drinking are  
 For ever at the fount whence comes his  
 thought."

And thus, ever countenanced by the  
 presence of his Beatrice, Dante is examined  
 by St. Peter about his Faith, by St. James  
 about his Hope, and about his Charity by  
 St. John who, bid by the Lord, put his hand  
 on Saul that he might receive his sight.—  
 Acts ix. 10-18.

.....La Donna, che per questa dia  
 Region ti conduce, ha nello sguardo  
 La virtù ch' ebbe la man d' Anania.

Because the Lady, who through this divine  
 Region conducteth thee, has in her look  
 The power the hand of Ananias had.

.....Quella pia, che guidò le penne  
 Delle mie ali a così alto volo.

.....The Compassionate, who piloted  
 The plumage of my wings in such high flight.

In the presence of St. John, whose  
 greater light outshines that of Beatrice,

Dante fears that she might have left him, and says :—

Ahi, quanto nella mente mi commossi,  
Quando mi volsi per veder Beatrice,  
Per non poter vederla, benchè io fossi  
Presso di lei e nel mondo felice.

Ah, how much in my mind I was disturbed,  
When I turned round to look on Beatrice,  
That her I could not see, although I was  
Close at her side and in the Happy World.

.....Dagli occhi miei ogni quisquiglia  
Fugò Beatrice col raggio de' suoi,  
Che rifulgean da più di mille miglia.

.....From before mine eyes did Beatrice  
Chase every mote with radiance of her own,  
That cast its light a thousand miles and more.

In hearing St. Peter reprove the vices that defiled the lives of the clergy in Dante's times, Beatrice blushes like an honest woman ; and this settles those commentators who assert that Beatrice is meant for Philosophy ; as no one has ever heard of a blushing Philosophy. Thus Dante says :—

.....Come donna onesta, che permane  
Di sè sicura, e per l'altrui fallanza,  
Pure ascoltando, timida si fane,  
Così Beatrice trasmutò sembianza.

.....As a modest woman, who abides  
Sure of herself, and at another's failing,  
From listening only, timorous becomes,  
Even thus did Beatrice change countenance.

Even when so high in the heavens, Dante speaks of his love for Beatrice with words expressing feelings anything but ethereal,

when in the following passage he uses the word *donnea* :—

La mente innamorata, che donnea  
Con la mia Donna sempre.....

My mind enamoured, which is dallying  
At all times with my Lady.....

Ma ella, che vedeva il mio desire,  
Incominciò ridendo tanto lieta,  
Che Dio parea nel suo volto gioire.

But she, who was aware of my desire,  
Began, the while she smiled so joyously  
That God seemed in her countenance to rejoice.

Quella, che imparadisa la mia mente.  
...She who doth imparadise my mind.

.....I begli occhi,  
Onde a pigliarmi fece Amor la corda.  
.....Those fair eyes,  
Of which Love made the springs to ensnare me.

La bellezza ch' io vidi si trasmoda  
Non pur di là da noi, ma certo io credo  
Che solo il suo Fattor tutta la goda.

Not only does the beauty I beheld  
Transcend ourselves, but truly I believe  
Its Maker only may enjoy it all.

.....Come Sole il viso che più trema,  
Così lo rimembrar del dolce riso  
La mente mia di sè medesma scema.

Dal primo giorno, che io vidi il suo viso  
In questa vita, insino a questa vista  
Non è il seguire al mio cantar preciso ;

Ma or convien che il mio seguir desista  
Più dietro a sua bellezza, poetando,  
Come all' ultimo suo ciascuno artista.

.....As the Sun the sight that trembles most,  
Even so the memory of that sweet smile  
My mind depriveth of its very self.

From the first day that I beheld her face  
In this life, to the moment of this look,  
The sequence of my song has ne'er been severed ;

But now perforce this sequence must desist  
From following her beauty with my verse,  
As every artist at his uttermost.

.....Il sol degli occhi miei.  
.....The sun of my eyes.

Then at last Beatrice leaves Dante, and resumes her place :—

.....Nel terzo giro  
Del sommo grado.....  
Nel trono, che i suoi merti le sortiro.

.....In the third round  
Of the first rank.....  
Upon the throne her merits have assigned her.

To her Dante addresses this last prayer :—  
“ O Donna, in cui la mia speranza vige ;  
E che soffristi per la mia salute  
In Inferno lasciar le tue vestige,

Di tante cose, quante io ho vedute,  
Dal tuo potere e dalla tua bontate  
Riconosco la grazia e la virtute.

Tu m' hai di servo tratto a libertate  
Per tutte quelle vie, per tutti i modi,  
Che di ciò fare avevan la potestate.

La tua magnificenza in me custodi,  
Sicchè l' anima mia, che fatta hai sana,  
Piacente a te dal corpo si disnodi.”

Così orai ; ed ella, sì lontana  
Come pareva, sorrise e riguardommi ;  
Poi si tornò all' eterna Fontana.

"O Lady, thou in whom my hope is strong,  
 And who for my salvation didst endure  
 In Hell to leave the imprint of thy feet,  
 Of whatsoever things I have beheld,  
 As coming from thy power and from thy goodness  
 I recognise the virtue and the grace.

Thou from a slave hast brought me unto freedom,  
 By all those ways, by all the expedients,  
 Whereby thou hadst the power of doing it.

Preserve towards me thy magnificence,  
 So that this soul of mine, which thou hast healed,  
 Pleasing to thee be loosened from the body."

Thus I implored ; and she, so far away,  
 Smiled, as it seemed, and looked once more at me ;  
 Then unto the eternal Fountain turned.

The poem ends by Dante saying how Beatrice joins the Angels and the Saints in their prayer to God for the salvation of Dante's soul :—

Gli occhi da Dio diletti e venerati  
 .....Mi dimostraro  
 Quanto i devoti prieghi le son grati.  
 Indi all' Eterno Lume si drizzaro,  
 Nel qual non si può creder che s' invii  
 Per creatura l' occhio tanto chiaro.

The eyes beloved and revered of God  
 .....Showed to me  
 How grateful unto her are prayers devout.  
 Then unto the Eternal Light they turned,  
 On which it is not credible could be  
 By any creature bent an eye so clear.

Even in this last mention of Beatrice, written at the end of the immortal poem, and very likely only a few weeks before the poet's death at Ravenna, his Beatrice is spoken of as a *creatura*—a "woman," a real woman, and not a principle, an abstraction, or an idea.

Mentioned by name sixty-four times in the *Divina Commedia*, Beatrice is still more often referred to in the course of the whole poem. It would be almost impossible to quote all these references without repeating the entire poem.

As I stated at the beginning of this paper, my only purpose in writing it has been that of pointing out to you everything that Dante wrote of his beloved Beatrice; and in this modest and useful purpose I hope to have succeed to your satisfaction. I feel confident that even to those few members—and they are indeed very few, as I can count them on the fingers of my right hand—who have refused hitherto to believe in the real existence of Beatrice, will be "manifesto l' error de' ciechi che si fanno duci"; and that they will henceforth believe rather what the Poet says of this beautiful woman, whom he so ardently loved, than what some of his commentators have written about Beatrice.

## THE BETTER WATERS OF PURGATORY

A LECTURE BY EDWARD WILBERFORCE, A  
MASTER OF THE SUPREME COURT; READ AT  
THE MEETING OF THE DANTE SOCIETY HELD  
AT THE PFEIFFER HALL, HARLEY STREET, W.,  
JANUARY 5TH, 1905. RICHARD GARNETT,  
C.B., LL.D., IN THE CHAIR.

MEMBERS of the Dante Society do not need to be told that the words which form the title of my lecture are taken from the opening line of the *Purgatory*. Still less do they need to be told what is the primary meaning of the words themselves. There can be little doubt that these refer to the more cheerful scenes through which the Poet is to be conducted, when he has emerged from the awful abyss descending to the centre of the earth, and proceeds to climb the mountain on whose summit is the Earthly Paradise. But as all students of Dante are apt to find a secondary meaning in his every word, we may perhaps detect in these a covert allusion to the higher and more serene flights of poetry which abound throughout the second chant of the *Divine Comedy*. This latter note appears to me to be struck most strongly in the invocation of

the Muses which forms part of the opening of the first Canto of the *Purgatory*, just as the description which immediately follows of the clear and exquisite atmosphere is in harmony with what I have called the primary meaning. Let me read those first lines as an illustration :—

To run o'er better waters hoists her sails  
 Henceforth, behind her left such cruel deep,  
 Thy little bark, my genius, to the gales.

And on that second realm my strings I 'll sweep,  
 Where purged the human spirit is from stain,  
 And worthy grows tow'rd Heaven to climb the steep.

But here dead poesy arise again,  
 Oh sacred Muses, since I 'm yours declared,  
 And here Calliope some height attain,

My song attending with that sound which scared  
 The miserable Picæ, when they knew  
 Its power so great of pardon they despaired.

Of oriental sapphire dulcet hue,  
 Which all was mantling in the aspect bright  
 Of the pure ether the first circle through,

Began to cause mine eyes a fresh delight,  
 Soon as I issued from that death-like air,  
 My breast which had so saddened, and my sight.

The planet ray that bids to love repair,  
 Beauteous, to laughter all the East inclined,  
 Veiling the Fishes which her escort bare.

Upon the other pole I fixed my mind,  
 Turned to the right, and there four stars descried,  
 Ne'er seen by any save our earliest kind.

Heaven from their flamelets seemed to joy allied ;  
Oh widowed site septentrional, to look  
On those admiring since to thee denied !

Through some of the cheerful scenes typified by these lines, and lit up by these stars—some of these higher flights of poetry—I propose to take you this evening, to furnish, as it were, the Itinerary of Purgatory taken by Dante and Virgil. The Poet himself shall be our guide, as Virgil was his, and the words in which the several scenes are described shall be his own if they can be fairly reproduced in another language.

At the outset of the poem we see the two Poets stopped by Cato of Utica, the guardian of the Mount of Purgatory. They have come by an unlawful way, and he wonders how they can have escaped from the infernal regions. Pacified by Virgil's assurances, he allows them to pass on, telling Virgil to wash Dante's face with dew and gird him with a smooth bulrush. In search of this the Poets go down to the seashore, and, as they reach it, we have one of those wonderful touches of which there are so many in the *Purgatory*, a few words bringing the whole scene before us.

Dawn was now conquering the morning breeze  
Which fled before, that so from far the main  
I marked, with quiver tremulous of seas.

Before the Poets have time to leave the shore they see a light coming swiftly towards them, and they recognize the Angel

Pilot who brings souls from Earth to the Mount of Purification. His coming is thus described :—

And, lo ! through the thick vapours fiery red  
As Mars at the approach of morning glows,  
Down in the West above the ocean bed,

Such seemed—oh ! once again that sight disclose !

So swiftly coming o'er the sea, a light,  
That no winged flight to match its motion knows.

From which a little when withdrawn my sight,  
That to my Guide I might a question frame ;  
Again I saw it, larger grown, more bright.

Next something white, I know not how to name,  
Showed on each side of it, and 'neath to swell  
Little by little other something came.

My Master spake as yet no syllable,  
Till wings the first white things were seen to be ;  
Then when he recognized the pilot well,

He cried : “ See, see, in awe thou bend the knee ;  
Of God behold the Angel : fold thine hands :  
Henceforth 'tis thine such ministers to see.

Lo ! human instruments with scorn he brands,  
So that he needs not oar, nor other sail  
Save his own wings, between such distant strands.

Lo ! how he makes them turned tow'rd Heav'n prevail,  
The air by those eternal pennons stirr'd  
Which ne'er, like mortal plumage, change or fail.”

Then nearer and more near us as the bird  
Divine approached, more lustrous did he rank,  
So was the eye from closer gaze deterred :

I bent it downward ; and he reached the bank  
With an exceeding swift and lightsome sloop,  
So as no whit of it the water drank.

Stood the celestial pilot on the poop,  
Such that the mere description made him  
blest ;  
Seated within some hundred spirits group.

All with one voice *In Exitu* expressed  
*Israel de Egypto*, and essayed  
In singing of that psalm what forms the rest.

Then signed the holy cross, and on them laid—  
Whereat they cast them all upon the shore—  
Swift as his coming was his parting made.

One of the spirits who thus landed is the  
musician Casella, a friend of Dante's while  
he lived, and the singer of his verses. The  
name is familiar to us from Milton's sonnet,  
in which, addressing his own friend Lawes,  
he says :—

Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher  
Than his Casella, whom he woo'd to sing,  
Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.

It would perhaps be hypercritical to ob-  
serve that it was not in Purgatory itself that  
this meeting took place, but in Ante-Purga-  
tory. But it may be more legitimate to  
express a doubt whether Dante would have  
placed any one else above the singer, the  
fascination of whose voice was such as to  
keep back that throng of spirits from climb-  
ing the mountain. A stern reproof from  
Cato was needed to remind them of the  
purpose which had brought them there,

and now both they and the two Poets begin the ascent. How steep that was is shown by reference to precipitous paths with which Dante's wanderings through Italy had made him familiar. I trust I am not trenching on the province occupied by Mr. Maurice Hewlett in his lecture on 'Dante and the Traveller'—which now forms part of his charming work *The Road in Tuscany*—if I cite two of these passages. One refers to the old Cornice road between Spezzia and Monaco :—

Lerici and Turbia 'twixt, a stair  
 Easy, accessible, with this to cope  
 The path most wild, most rugged, would compare.

The other also speaks of a place on the Riviera, but couples it with two others—one of them near San Marino, and one in the mountains of Reggio :—

One gains San Leo with the feet alone,  
 Descends to Noli, clammers to the height  
 Bismantova, but here one must have flown,  
 I mean with the swift wings and feathered flight  
 Of great desire.

However, in spite of all difficulties, the Poets gradually climb up to the gate of Purgatory, though on their way they stop to converse with spirits of various classes. First of all, there are some who died excommunicate, but who were contrite at the time of their death. These, as Dante is told by King Manfred of Naples and Sicily,

who is one of them, have to remain outside the gate of Purgatory for a period thirty times as long as the time during which they were excommunicated. Next come those who, through their indolence, delayed their repentance till just before death, and among them Dante introduces the Florentine Belacqua whom he had known in life, and who here retains the habits of indolence for which he was then notorious. The third group consists of those who died a violent death, repenting of their sins at the last moment. Buonconte da Montefeltro, who is one of them, gives a dramatic description of his fate :—

Beneath the Casentine  
Crosses a stream called Archiano, born  
Above the Hermitage on Apennine.

There, where its proper name is quite outworn,  
I had arrived, as on my feet I fled,  
My throat, the plain to ensanguine, pierced  
and torn.

There I lost sight, and of my speech the thread  
Broke with the name of Mary, there I fell,  
So that my flesh remained untenanted.

The truth I'll speak ; do thou to others tell ;  
God's angel took me, and "Why rob me?"  
cried,  
"Oh ! thou from Heaven ?" the messenger of  
Hell.

"Thou bearest from me his eternal side  
For one small tear, which takes him from my  
hold ;  
But with the rest shall other rule be tried.'

Well knowest how in air together roll'd  
 That humid vapour shows, to rain returned  
 Soon as uprisen where condensed by cold.

That evil will, which but for evil yearn'd,  
 He joined to intellect, and mists and blast  
 Through power bestowed him by his nature,  
 churn'd.

Then he with cloud when once the day was  
 past,  
 To the great ridge from Pratomagno fill'd  
 The valley, and the skies above o'ercast,

That water so the teeming air distill'd ;  
 The rain downshowered, and the runnels  
 swell'd  
 So much as to absorb earth never will'd :

And when to join the mighty streams impell'd,  
 Towards the royal river thus it raced  
 Impetuous, that nought its course withheld.

My body frozen at its outlet placed  
 The swollen Archiano found, and bore  
 Down to the Arno, and the cross effaced

Made on my breast when pain o'ermastering  
 tore ;  
 It rolled me by its banks, and on its bed ;  
 Then girt me with its spoil and covered o'er.

Another member of the same group is  
 Pia de' Tolomei whose life story has been so  
 strangely distorted by M. Sardou. Then  
 we have several who jostle Dante as the  
 winner of a game of hazard is jostled by  
 those who wish to share his luck.

Here was the Aretine, in death's embrace  
 By Ghin di Tacco with fierce arms subdued,  
 And drowned the other running in the chase.

Here hands outstretching Federico sued  
 Novello, and of Pisa he who stirr'd  
 In good Marzucco show of fortitude.

I saw Count Orso, and the spirit spurr'd  
 Through hatred and through envy from its  
 frame,  
 Not fault committed, as himself averred,

Pierre de la Brosse I say, and let the dame  
 Here, while yet living, of Brabant take heed,  
 Lest a worse flock for this her presence  
 claim.

We now come to a most interesting episode, the meeting of the Poets with Sordello, the subject of Browning's poem. Virgil's first word to Sordello shows that they are fellow citizens of Mantua—and great as is the joy of the shade to find that the new comer is from his own city, much greater is it when he knows that he is speaking to one whom he calls "the glory of the Latins"—"the deathless honour of my native reign." But to readers of the *Divine Comedy*, the special interest which attaches to the meeting with Sordello is that it gives Dante occasion for the magnificent invective against Italy and against Florence which is one of the grandest passages in the *Purgatory*. Seeing Virgil and Sordello embrace at the very name of Mantua, Dante bursts out indignantly :—

Ah ! slave of Italy, in tempest high  
 Ship without pilot, hostelry of woe,  
 Not dame of provinces, but brothel sty !

That noble soul such readiness could show,  
 Of his own city sweet the very sound,  
 Its citizen glad welcome to bestow ;

And never now thy living in thy bound  
 Stand free from warfare, and each gnaws at  
 each  
 Those whom the selfsame walls and moats  
 surround.

Search, wretched, round its every coast and beach  
 Thy seaboard, and if peace of thee the least  
 Rejoice, let glances in thy bosom teach.

What boots it that Justinian should have pieced  
 Thy rein together, with the saddle bare?  
 Without him surely were the shame decreased.

Ah ! folk, that should have given yourselves to  
 prayer,  
 And Cæsar in the saddle left to sit,  
 If what God teaches well ye make your care,

Mark how this beast has learnt so fierce a fit,  
 Not having been corrected with the spur,  
 Since ye have placed your hands upon the  
 bit.

Oh German Albert, that abandoned her,  
 Grown so untamed and savage, to bestride  
 Whose saddle bows thou oughtest to prefer,

Just judgment falling from the stars betide  
 Thy blood, and prove so manifest and new  
 That thy successor may by fear be tried ;

Since thou hast suffered and thy sire such rue,  
 Lured by cupidity from thence astray,  
 That waste the garden of the empire grew.

Come Montagues and Capulets survey,  
 Monaldi, Filippeschi, careless man,  
 Those sad already, these suspicion's prey.

Come, cruel, come, and of thy nobles scan  
 The straits, redress their wrongs, and thou  
 shalt see  
 If safety Santafiore knows to plan.

Come and behold thy Rome which weeps for  
 thee,  
 Widowed and lone, and day and night ex-  
 claims :  
 " My Cæsar, why hast thou forsaken me ? "

Come see the people whom such love inflames ;  
 And should thy breast for us no pity move  
 Come till thine own renown thy spirit shames.

And if 'tis granted me, supremest Jove,  
 Once crucified on earth for our behoof,  
 Are thy just eyes but elsewhere turned to rove?

Or in the abysses of thy counsel, proof  
 Mak'st thou of preparation for some good  
 From our perception wholly cut aloof?

For fills all towns of Italy the brood  
 Of tyrants, and the partisan who went  
 To play, each churl a true Marcellus stood.

And then, as the Poet turns to Florence,  
 this outspoken denunciation turns into an  
 irony which is yet more scathing :—

My Florence, thou shouldst be full well content  
 With this digression which concerns thee not,  
 Thanks to thy folk that so to wisdom leant.

Many at heart have justice, but 'tis shot,  
 Brought to the bow with too much counsel,  
 late,  
 But that thy people's very lips have got.

Many refuse the burdens of the state :  
 But eagerly thy populace reply  
 Without a call, and cry : " I bear the weight."

Now make thee glad, for thou hast reason why :  
 Thou who art rich, at peace, in wisdom trained,  
 The effect will make it clear, unless I lie

Athens and Lacedæmon, that ordained  
 The ancient laws, and were so civilised,  
 For living well a puny sign maintained

Compared with thee, so subtly who devised  
 Provisions, ne'er to mid November last  
 Thy spinnings which October exercised.

How oft, when thou rememberest the past,  
 Laws, coinage, offices and customs, quite  
 Hast changed, renewed thy members and  
 recast !

And if thou well canst mind, and see the light,  
 The semblance thine of her in sickness lain,  
 Who finds the down to no repose invite,  
 But seeks in turning some relief from pain.

Sordello now leads the Poets to the Flowery Valley where the souls of great princes are assembled. Evening draws on as they arrive, and the first evening on the mountain inspires those well-known lines the echo of which comes to our ears in the opening of Gray's *Elegy* :—

Now was the hour to soft desire which bends  
 Seafarers, melts with tenderness their hearts  
 The day they've bid farewell to cherished  
 friends :

And the new pilgrim pierces with the darts  
 Of love, if heard the bell from distance, fain  
 Which seems to weep day's dying, as it parts.

Here is the original of “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.” But while

the original is infinitely superior to the copy, I am not disposed to adopt the view of Macaulay, who in one of his early writings (an essay in Knight's *Quarterly Magazine* for 1824, which I believe has not been republished) says that "Gray's imitation of Dante's noble line is one of the most striking instances of injudicious plagiarism with which I am acquainted. Dante did not put this strong personification at the beginning of his description. The imagination of the reader is so well prepared for it by the previous lines, that it appears perfectly natural and pathetic. Placed as Gray has placed it, neither preceded nor followed by anything that harmonizes with it, it becomes a frigid conceit." We may relish the praise so justly bestowed upon Dante without making it the vehicle for depreciation of Gray. To my mind a much worthier and more generous criticism of Gray is to be found in John Morley's Introduction to Wordsworth, where he speaks of "the immortal Elegy, of which we may truly say that it has for nearly a century and a half given to greater multitudes of men more of the exquisite pleasure of poetry than any other single piece in all the glorious treasury of English verse."

After passing the night in the Flowery Valley, Dante is borne in sleep up to the gate of Purgatory, and the Poets are admitted by the Angel Warder who keeps it.

Passing through they begin to mount from one cornice to another, so as to make their way through the seven cornices on which the seven deadly sins are purified. The first cornice shows the punishment of Pride, the sinners bowed down under heavy weights. On the second, Envy is punished ; the eyelids sewn up with iron wire. The third is devoted to Anger, enveloped in a gloom which is darker than night. The fourth is the place of Sloth, and that is punished by its opposite, the souls being forced to run at the top of their speed. The fifth cornice is that of Avarice, where the souls grovel on the earth with their faces downward. With the sixth cornice we come to Gluttony, the punishment of which is extreme emaciation. The seventh and last shows us Lust, which is purified in flames. Each of these cornices has its special characteristic features ; some of them rendered memorable by the scenes or the sufferings described ; some by the characters introduced, or the nature of their discourse. Thus the cornice of Pride is notable for the lifelike description of sculptures on the wall and on the pavement. These are the sculptures on the wall of the first cornice dealing with humility :—

Our feet not yet had moved upon its height,  
When I perceived the bank in circle worn  
Which, sheer, no means of climbing showed,  
was white

With marble, and such sculptures that adorn,  
Not only works by Polycletus wrought,  
But Nature's self had there been put to scorn.

The Angel who came down to earth, and brought  
The law of peace so many years bewept,  
Heaven to relax long interdict that taught,

Before me there to sight so lifelike leapt  
Sculptured with gracious look in act to bless,  
That he no image seemed which silence kept.

One would have sworn that "Hail!" was his  
address;  
For there was she portrayed who turned the  
key  
Of Love Divine to open the recess.

And on her action graved this speech had she,  
"Behold the handmaid of the Lord," distinct  
As upon wax a figure stamped we see.

"Fix not thy mind alone on one precinct,"  
The gentle Master said, as me he held  
Upon that side to which man's heart is link'd.

Wherefore I turned my vision, and beheld  
Behind the Virgin Mary, on the side  
At which he stood who there my steps im-  
pelled,

Another story to the rock applied:  
Wherefore I passed by Virgil, and drew near  
That by mine eyes it might be so described.

On the same marble sculptured there appear  
The cart and kine the sacred ark that bring,  
Whence men to take unbidden office fear.

Before it folk were shown; and all the string  
Parted in seven choirs, of either sense  
Made one say "No," the other, "Yes, they  
sing."

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So likewise at the smoke of frankincense  
Which there was imaged, eyes and nose to  
mate  
With Yes and No were set at difference.

Preceding there the vessel consecrate  
The humble Psalmist danced with girt attire,  
More than a King and less in such a state.

There Michal, opposite portrayed, in ire  
From a great palace window gazing showed,  
Like one in whom disdain and grief conspire.

In contrast with these, the sculptures on the pavement give us instances of pride taken almost alternately from sacred and profane history, introducing first Lucifer, then Briareus and the other giants, Nimrod, Niobe, Saul, Arachne, Rehoboam, Alcmæon, Sennacherib, Cyrus, and Holofernes. But the most notable feature of this description is the artful construction of the whole passage, made up as it is first of four terzets, each beginning with the word *Veda*, I saw; then of four others, each beginning with the exclamation "Oh!" and then four, each beginning with the word *Mostrava*, displayed; all of which groups are then summarized in one, where the first word of each line corresponds with the initial word of every group consecutively:—

I saw him, nobler fashioned in his pride  
Than other creature, down from Heaven's  
high sill  
Fall like a flash of lightning, on one side.

I saw Briareus, whom was keen to drill  
The dart celestial, on the other hand  
Lie heavy on the ground in deathly chill.

I saw Thymbræus, Mars and Pallas stand  
Around their sire I saw in arms as yet,  
The scattered limbs of giants as they scann'd.

I saw as if bewildered Nimrod set  
At foot of his great work, to scrutinize  
Those who in Shinar did like pride beget.

Oh Niobe, with what lamenting eyes  
Thee pictured on the pathway did I view  
Twixt children seven and seven, of death the  
prize !

Oh Saul, how by thy very sword thrust through  
Here dead appearedst on Gilboa's height,  
Which felt thereafter neither rain nor dew !

Oh fool Arachne, thus didst meet my sight  
Half spider now, in sorrow o'er the shreds  
Of work thou wroughtest in such evil plight !

Oh Rehoboam, here no longer treads  
Thine image threatening, but a chariot hence  
Bears it, forestalling the pursuit it dreads !

Displayed too the hard pavement to the sense  
How to his mother made Alcmaeon bear  
The luckless ornament so vast expense.

Displayed how on Sennacherib his pair  
Of guilty sons within the temple burst,  
And how, as dead he lay, they left him there.

Displayed the ruin and fierce carnage nurst  
By Tomyris, to Cyrus when she said :  
“With blood I fill thee, since for blood thy  
thirst.”

Displayed how routed the Assyrians fled  
After that Holofernes had been slain,  
And relics of that massacre, the dead.

I saw in ashes Troy and hollows lain :  
    Oh Ilion, how abject and abased  
        Displayed thee sculpture which is there so  
            plain !

It is most remarkable that what I once heard called "the standard translation of Dante," does not make the slightest attempt to reproduce this very striking feature of the original, nor does it even hint in a note at its existence, so that any one whose knowledge of Dante is derived only from Cary would altogether fail to appreciate the subtle and elaborate art and skill employed by the poet on this passage.

On the next cornice, where Envy is purged, we meet with two memorable descriptions by a spirit from Romagna, Guido del Duca, one of the course of the Arno, the other of the state of his own country. Dante had been asked whence he came, and had answered by alluding to a stream which flowed through midmost Tuscany, but of which he did not give the name. Guido del Duca approves of the name of the Arno being suppressed, because the dwellers on its banks are so brutish that they seem to have been fed in Circe's pasture. Speaking first of the people of the Casentino, then of those of Arezzo, of Florence and of Pisa, he says :—

Amidst foul hogs, on acorns to regale  
    Worthier than other food man's use attends,  
        It first directs its poor and scanty trail.

Then curs it finds, as downwards it descends,  
Snarling more fiercely than their power supplies,  
And thence its snout disdainfully it bends.

Falling it goes, and more it swells in size,  
So much the more that wolves the dogs are made  
The accursèd and ill-fated foss descries.

Then by deep gorges borne on downward grade,  
Foxes it finds so full of fraud, that fear  
Of craft to trap them makes them not afraid.

We might think that the Envy which is being purged on this cornice dictated such a diatribe against a part of Italy which was not the speaker's own; but we find him still less inclined to spare his native country of Romagna. Describing his companion in Purgatory as much worthier than those who have succeeded him in his earthly dignity, he says :—

This is Rinier, who prize and honour graced  
The house of Calboli, where none as heir  
Of his high worth has since the structure based.

Nor from his race alone has been stripped bare  
"Twixt Po and mountain, Reno and the sea,  
The good which truth and pastime sought to share;

For all is full 'twixt either boundary  
Of roots so venomous, that slow incline  
Would culture self to lessen the degree.

Where is good Lizio, where Mainardi's sign ?  
Pier Traversaro, of Carpigna Guy ?  
Oh, turned to bastards all Romagna's line !

When in Bologna will a Fabbro vie?  
 Faenza, Bernardin di Fosco rear,  
 Illustrious growth of humble progeny?

Marvel not, Tuscan, if I shed a tear  
 Guido da Prata, with him to recall  
 Ugolin d'Azzo, dwelling in our sphere;

Frederick Tignoso and his comrades all,  
 The Traversari, Anastagi (these  
 Both houses doomed without an heir to fall),

The ladies and the knights, the toils, the ease,  
 That, where such malice in the hearts is bred,  
 Inspired our souls with love and courtesies.

We may notice in passing that the last terzett has evidently inspired the opening lines of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.

The third cornice comes next where Anger is purged, and where the souls are enveloped in so thick a mist that Dante cannot find anything to bear comparison with it. His vain search for a simile is shown in these lines:—

Gloom of deep Hell, and of a night despoiled  
 Of every planet 'neath a niggard sky,  
 Dark to the full with cloud upon it coiled,

Made not so dense a veil before mine eye  
 As did that smoke which served us there to  
 shroud,  
 Nor to the feeling of so harsh a ply.

And his sensations on leaving the dense atmosphere thus:—

Bethink thee, in the Alps if ever stole,  
 Reader, on thee a mist which pierced thy gaze  
 Not otherwise its skin than doth the mole:

How when the vapours humid, dense in haze,  
Begin to dissipate themselves, the sphere  
Among them of the sun so feebly strays :

And swift will thine imagining appear  
To come and witness how I first descried  
The sun again, its setting which was near.

My steps so mating with those faithful tried,  
My Master's, forth I issued from that cloud  
To rays which on low shores already died.

If I may borrow an illustration from one of my predecessors, Dr. Garnett, whom we so much regret to miss this evening, I may say that the passage he quotes from Boyd's translation of Dante shows how the comparison of which the Poet was in search could have been supplied. Boyd thought it a great pity that Dante was not acquainted with the works of the Rev. John Scott, a London clergyman of the seventeenth century. We may think it a pity that Dante was not acquainted with London fog of the twentieth, as the atmosphere we have passed through lately would have been in the highest degree appropriate to that of the third cornice, exceeding it in density as much as in the harshness of its texture.

Passing the fourth cornice, where Sloth is purified, we reach the fifth, which is allotted to the punishment of Avarice, and there we are shown the grand figure of the founder of the royal dynasty of France. He, too, like the last character presented to us, bewails the degeneracy of his

descendants, and thus enables Dante to deal in fierce invective against Philip the Fair, who was then on the throne. Thus speaks Hugh Capet :—

I was the root of that malignant plant,  
Which so o'er shades all Christian lands' extent  
That to be gathered thence good fruit is scant.

But if Douai and Lille, if Bruges and Ghent  
Had power, would vengeance swiftly come : I  
pray  
Him who all judges it may not relent.

Hugh Capet there they called me in my day :  
From me sprang Philips, Louis, to acquire  
In recent times o'er France unquestioned  
sway.

For me, a Paris butcher was my sire.  
When all the ancient monarchs were no more  
Save one, who took him to the grey attire,

I found both hands of mine gripped tightly o'er  
The reins of the realm's government, and won  
Such power anew, and such of friends my  
store,

That to the widowed diadem my son  
Had soon his head promoted, whence that  
hour  
The consecrated bones of those begun.

So long as then the great Provençal dower  
Served not from shame to set my offspring  
free,  
It did no mischief, small as was its power.

There both by violence and perjury  
Began its rapine : after for amends  
Normandy took, Ponthieu and Gascony.

Charles came to Italy, and for amends  
Made Conradin a victim, and again  
Drove back to heaven St. Thomas, for amends.

I see a time, not far beyond our ken,  
Which shall bring forth another Charles from  
France,  
To make himself known better and his men.

Unarmed he issues lone, and with the lance  
Which Judas tilted with, and that his aim  
To burst the paunch of Florence bids advance.

No territory thence, but sin and shame  
Will he acquire, and that will be more grave  
To him, the lighter he esteems such blame.

The other, whom his ship to prison gave,  
I see his daughter sell, and make a price  
As Corsairs haggle o'er each other slave.

What more canst do with us, oh avarice,  
My race to thee so wholly drawn that hast,  
It shrinks not its own flesh to sacrifice ?

That less may seem the future ill, the past,  
I see the fleur-de-lys Alagna cleaves,  
And in His Vicar Christ in bondage cast.

I see another time that mocking grieves ;  
I see the vinegar and gall renewed,  
And see him slain between two living thieves.

I see so cruel the new Pilate's mood,  
This sates not, but his sails, no sanction had,  
Within the Temple covetous intrude.

Oh, when, my Lord, shall I be rendered glad  
To see the vengeance, which thy counsels  
hide  
In secret, sweetness to thy wrath to add ?

During the rest of the poem Dante has the company of Statius, who is just released from the fifth cornice, where he was being purified, not from Avarice, but from its opposite, Prodigality, and who remains with Dante even after Virgil is lost to him. The three Poets are shown those who suffer emaciation on the sixth cornice, they pass through the fire which burns on the seventh, and then they reach the Earthly Paradise. The last six cantos of the second chant are devoted to this subject, and we have a succession of scenes of surpassing interest. The description of the place itself, of the lovely lady who was culling flowers on the other side of the clear stream of Lethe, the mystical procession of the seven golden candlesticks, followed by the four-and-twenty elders, the four living creatures like those seen by Ezekiel and in the Apocalypse, the car excelling all those shown in Roman triumphs and even that of the Sun, the seven Virgins dancing at its wheels, lastly, the appearance of Beatrice on the car, make up a wonderful picture. The Earthly Paradise is thus depicted :—

Already faint the forest to survey  
Divine, luxuriant, fresh, within, around,  
Which tempered to mine eyes the newborn day,

Not pausing of the bank I left the bound,  
Across the plain slow pacing, ever slow,  
Where on all sides sweet fragrance steeps  
the ground.

An air soft breathing, in it that could show  
No variance, smote me on the forehead, laid  
Than gentle wind on me no heavier blow ;

Through which the branches, quick to tremble  
made,  
Were bending one and all toward the part  
Where cast the holy mount its earliest shade ;

Yet from their own uprightness not to start  
So much that little birds in topmost trees  
Could cease the practice of their every art ;

But with full ecstacy each morning breeze  
Carolling they received among the fronds  
Which formed a burden to their melodies,

Such as knit up from branch to branch responds  
Through the pine forest on Chiassi's shore,  
When Æolus lets loose Scirocco's bonds.

So far already my slow paces bore  
Within the ancient wood, that back to look  
Where I had entered I could see no more :

And lo ! my further progress stayed a brook,  
Which bent towards the left upon its sides  
The grass that grew, and its small wavelets  
shook.

All water that on earth most limpid glides  
Would seem in it some mixture to combine  
Placed by the side of this that nothing hides ;

Albeit still it flows in darker line  
'Neath the perpetual shade, which there denies  
The sun for ever or the moon to shine.

After an explanation has been given to  
Dante of the mysterious conditions of the  
Earthly Paradise, a sudden light shines  
through the forest, and the procession

comes which heralds the approach of Beatrice. Dante compares the seven golden candlesticks which head the pageant to the seven stars forming the constellation of the Great Bear, and with this simile he begins the canto devoted to the object of his great desire.

When the septentrion of heaven most high,  
 Which ne'er has setting known, and rising  
 ne'er,  
 Nor other cloud save sin to veil its sky—

And in that spot which rendered each aware  
 Of his own duty, as that lower wain  
 Bids him who turns the helm to port repair—

Came to a halt, of truthful folk the train  
 Which first between it and the Gryphon  
 press'd,  
 Turned to the car as though their peace to  
 gain :

And one of them, as if by heaven's behest  
 Sent down, "Come spouse from Lebanon," to  
 sing,  
 Cried out three times, and after him the rest.

As will the Blest at the last summoning  
 Rise swiftly, all from out their sepulchres,  
 In voice restored while Hallelujahs ring,

Such of the life eternal ministers  
 A hundred rose *ad vocem tanti senis*  
 Upon that car divine, and messengers.

They all began "*Benedictus qui venis*,"  
 And casting flowers above and round, to say  
 "*Manibus o date lilia plenis*."

I have beheld ere now at break of day  
 The eastern hemisphere all rosy bright,  
 And fair the rest of heaven, serenely gay ;

And the sun's face arise with shaded light,  
 So that the vapours' tempering empowers  
 The eye long season to endure the sight ;

Thus in the centre of a cloud of flowers  
 Which rose from the angelic hands that strew,  
 And fell again within, without, in showers,

Crowned o'er white veil with olive, to my view  
 Appeared a Lady, 'neath a mantle green  
 Of living flame apparelled with the hue.

And now so long my spirit which had been  
 Such that no more 'twas broken down, to lie  
 Trembling with awed amaze her presence  
 seen,

Without more knowledge gaining by mine eye,  
 Through virtue which occult from her was  
 shed,  
 Of ancient love felt the great potency.

Soon as to smite upon my vision sped  
 The lofty virtue, which had pierced my sense  
 Before that forth from boyhood I was led,

I turned me to the left with confidence  
 As runs a child its mother's help to claim  
 When fear or anguish holds it in suspense,

To say to Virgil : " Less within my frame  
 Than drop of blood which trembles not is left ;  
 I feel the tokens of the ancient flame."

This last line, literally translated from  
 one of Virgil's own, does not reach Virgil's  
 ears, for with the appearance of Beatrice  
 he has vanished. Dante's lamentations at

the loss of his faithful guide are stilled by Beatrice's reproaches, which occupy much of this and of the next canto.

But Virgil of himself had us bereft,  
    Virgil my dearest father, Virgil whose  
        The side to which for safety I had cleft ;

Nor all that did the ancient mother lose  
    Availed, that were not stained by tears of woe  
        My cheeks again, so lately washed with dews,

'Dante, because that Virgil hence doth go,  
    Weep not as yet, weep not as yet, but learn  
        Of other sword that thou must weep the blow.'

Ev'n as an admiral, to prow or stern  
    Who comes to watch the crews that serve on board  
        The other ships, and makes them zealous burn

Upon the car's left rim, when thitherward  
    Turned of my name the sound I could detect,  
        Which of necessity I here record,

I saw the Lady, witnessed earlier, deck'd  
    With veiling 'neath the angelic festival,  
        Across the stream her eyes to me direct.

Although the veil which from her head did fall,  
    Encircled with Minerva's foliage green,  
        Held her, not wholly manifest, in thrall,

Imperious, with the gesture of a queen,  
    Continued she, like one who speaks with heed  
        To treasure to the last his phrase most keen :

"Look well : 'tis Beatrice, 'tis indeed :  
    How to approach the mount didst worthy deem ?  
        Knewst not that happiness is here the meed?"

Beatrice's reproaches, Dante's penitence, lead up to the closing scenes. After drinking of Lethe, which takes away the memory of sin, the poet is allowed to drink of the other stream Eunoe, which revives the memory of every good deed. Thus he describes his experience, and with his immersion in these waters, the best of all the waters of Purgatory, the poem ends.

And more resplendent, and with slower pace,  
The sun the circle of meridian kept,  
Which here and there, as witnessed, shifts its  
place,

When halted, as his course doth intercept  
One who in front of folk as escort goes,  
Finding aught novel where he would have  
stept,

The seven ladies at pale shadow's close,  
Such as 'neath blackened boughs and leafage  
green  
An Alp upon its icy torrents throws.

Before them Tigris and Euphrates seen  
Seemed from one fount as issuing they  
began,  
And parted slow as if they friends had been.

" Oh light, oh glory of the race of man,  
What is this water, spreading from the same  
Beginning, from itself itself that ran ? "

" Pray,"—for such prayer to me the answer  
came—  
" Matilda that she show thee " ; and replied,  
As doth the man who 'clears himself from  
blame,

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OF PURGATORY.

The beauteous Lady : "This and things beside,  
By me were told him ; and from him I'm sure  
That Lethe's water served them not to hide."

And Beatrice : "Haply to endure  
Some greater care, which memory oft devours,  
His mind has rendered in its sight obscure."

But Eunoe behold which yonder showers ;  
Lead him thereto, and with thy wonted use  
Revive in him again his fainting powers."

Like gentle soul that never makes excuse,  
But makes another's will its will to be  
Soon as to show it doth a sign induce ;

Thus moved, when she had taken hold of me,  
The beauteous Lady, Statius address'd,  
"Come with him," with a Lady's courtesy.

Could I but, Reader, longer space invest  
In writing, I would sing at least in part  
Of that sweet draught which ne'er could sate  
my breast ;

But since already full is every chart  
This second chant allotted to conclude,  
No further yields the bridle of my art.

Returning by that holiest wave bedewed,  
Regenerate so was I from earthly scars  
As with new foliage new plants renewed,  
Pure and disposed for mounting to the stars.

## LA LUPA DANTESCA

BY THE REV. W. J. PAYLING WRIGHT, B.A. ;  
READ AT THE MEETING OF THE DANTE  
SOCIETY OF MARCH 1ST, 1905. EDMUND  
GOSSE, ESQ., LL.D., IN THE CHAIR.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

When I undertook to speak to you this evening I imagined that I had something novel to submit to your censure, but, alas for the vanity of literary priority! On reading Scartazzini's microscopic notes with a more than usually microscopic eye, I find—not without encouragement—that I have been anticipated, and must begin with that execration which is due to the man who says our good things before us.

In a work published at Naples in 1850, Torricelli maintained that the she-wolf of the first canto of the *Divine Comedy* is the symbol of Death.

Living as I do

Far from all people's preese as in exile.

I have not been able to see his book and do not know what arguments he used or how he fared with the critics. Apparently, they ignored him.

Two years ago another Italian Dantist, Signor del Chicca, writing in the *Rassegna Nazionale* of February 1st, 1903, came to the same conclusion. He also thought that he was the first in the field; but as a matter of fact, he was doubly mistaken. He had been forestalled in England as well as in Italy. Nearly twelve months earlier, the person who now addresses you had published an essay in support of this interpretation.

To-night, then, I am to be the champion of the thesis of Torricelli that Dante's famous she-wolf stands for Death; and my arguments will be partly my own, and in part derived from the article by Signor del Chicca to which I have just referred.

Two prefatory remarks must be made.

The first is that Dante's symbolism is of manifold meaning. It is what is called "polysensuous," consequently, the establishment of one main and primary interpretation does not necessarily invalidate and exclude all others; so if any one wishes to insist on the political or any other theory, I have no quarrel with him, so long as he is willing to take a second place.

My second remark is that the first two cantos of the *Inferno* must be read together. For the sake of symmetry, the 100 cantos of the *Divine Comedy* are, by most, divided into three sets of 33 each; and the first canto is regarded as an introduction to the whole. Temptingly symmetrical as this is,

I must maintain that the first two cantos of the *Inferno* are inseparably connected, and that the two together are the proem of Dante's great work.

The contents of these two cantos are too familiar to call for detailed recapitulation. Only the first half of life's journey completed, the dark wood, the fear, the breathless escape, the successive appearances of the lion, the leopard, and the wolf, the coming of Virgil, the mutual discourse of the Latin and the Florentine poet—all these are old acquaintances.

Equally well known is the traditional and orthodox interpretation that the wood represents the life of evil and that the three beasts are the symbols of the three great cardinal sins of luxury, pride and avarice.

For what seems to me to be a destructive criticism of this venerable doctrine, I must refer you to Scartazzini's "prolegomeni." With great force he asks why these three creatures, if they stand for the deadly sins, are first met with on the hillside which Dante is already ascending, and not in the dark wood of sin, which would seem to be their proper and natural habitat. He has already escaped from the wood and left his sinful past behind him when these concrete sins first cross his path. They are in the wrong place. They ought to be in the darkness of the forest. But they are on the slope of the sunlit hill.

But, whatever we may think of Scartazzini's criticism, his attempt at reconstruction is not very convincing. He asks us to say that the leopard stands for unbelief, the lion for pride, and the wolf for false doctrine.

Another Dantist, Poletto, in his *Dizionario Dantesco*, seems to come nearer the mark. He would give a wider connotation to the word "avarice," and make it include unlawful and inordinate desire of every kind, and if for such words as "avarice" and "cupidity" we substitute the forcible Anglo-Saxon "greed," we get an excellent meaning. Greed is the mark of this beast. For whatever else our she-wolf may be, she is, without gainsaying, monstrously greedy. Like the daughters of the horse-leech, she is among the things that are never satisfied, and that never say "enough."

The wolf, then, stands for greed, and in the first canto she stands for a special kind of greed, the insatiable hunger of the grave. The fear she causes is that fear of death through which men are all their lifetime subject to bondage. The liberty which Dante is seeking, and "which is so dear," includes at least emancipation from that bondage, for which Cato, by the manner of his death, had already shown his contempt. To the virtuous pagan death was a chimæra. To the Christian it is an intense reality. How could a Christian of

Dante's day rise superior to it and to the dread of something after death? To me, one aspect of the *Divine Comedy* is that of a sublime epic showing how man can become more than conqueror of his dread of Death.

My arguments are cumulative, and seem to point consistently in one direction.

1. The fictive date—or rather the fictive season—of Dante's pilgrimage. We all agree that his journey was made at Easter. Why Easter? Because the first great papal Jubilee culminated at the Easter of the year 1300. Is not this a little superficial? May there not be a profounder meaning? Is there not an "Imitatio Christi"—a conscious one, for unconscious it cannot be. We may see how, almost hour by hour Dante's experience coincides in time with the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord. On the eve of Good Friday our Lord was in the agony of the garden and Dante was in utter desolation of soul in the dark wood. On Good Friday itself each passes through the gates of death into the mysterious world beyond. Both spend Holy Saturday in visiting the spirits in prison. Very early in the morning of Easter Day, ere it is yet dawn, each rises again, and Dante himself as well as his "dead song" has his resurrection. What can we make of such a parallel—so complete and obvious? We must conclude that Dante deliberately intended to associate

his journey inseparably with the Death and Resurrection of our Lord.

2. The key-note of the first two cantos is *Fear*—a fear so intense and overwhelming that Virgil bluntly and contemptuously brands it as cowardice. Fear, not to say abject terror, is his one overmastering emotion. He dwells on it again and again. The very thought of the dark wood renews it. He pants with uncontrollable agitation as he looks back on the pass from which he has so narrowly escaped. His fear is renewed by the lion; and the she-wolf makes him tremble in every pulse and vein. This fear—this terror by night—this horror of great darkness—is the instinctive and shuddering presentiment which men feel on the threshold of the ghostly and supernatural. It is as much physical as it is moral. It is not remorse. It is panic. He is utterly unmanned. As Virgil says, it is cowardice; a cowardice which is unworthy—for the things Dante fears are not really fearful. But standing on the border line, the sensitive, imaginative, realistic soul of the great poet shrinks back from “the land of darkness and of the shadow of death, a land of thick darkness, as darkness itself; a land of the shadow of death, without any order and where the light is as darkness.” Distress and anguish make him afraid. He is going down to the bars of Hades, and fear comes upon him and trembling. In spirit he

must die. Without an experience analogous to death he cannot explore the hidden world. He must have an intense realisation of man's mortality—stripped naked and bare of the consolation of faith, and without God's rod and staff to comfort him. This explains the bitterness to which he alludes with something approaching self-pity. "So bitter is it, death is little more." He was tasting the bitterness of death.

3. The opening line of the *Divine Comedy*, with its solemn cadence, is inspired by the dirge of Hezekiah or of the Hebrew Psalmist. "Call me not away in the half of my years" (Ps. cii. 24), is the cry of the latter. "In the half of my years I shall go into the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the residue of my years," is the exceeding bitter cry of the Hebrew king (Is. xxxix. 10). So to Dante it was premature. "Half-way along the highroad of our life." To Brunetto Latino he says later on :—

Up there above us in the life serene  
.....I lost me in a valley.

Or ever yet my age had been completed.

*Inf.*, xv. 49.

This is not the language of the penitent. There is no prick of conscience in it. He is almost as innocent and as much to be pitied as the young lady in *Comus*. What theologians call the sense of sin is wanting, and if it had been there, Virgil was hardly the man to relieve him. The nearest priest would have done better. But, on the other

hand, his language is fit enough and becoming enough from the heart of a man encompassed by the sorrows of death before his time. Dante and Hezekiah were in the same evil case: and the best commentary on Dante's fears will be found in a careful perusal of the Hebrew monarch's pathetic prayer. Remember also that the dark wood was a valley (cf. *Inf.* i. 14). "I lost me in a valley." That gorge overhung by its gloomy forest was no other than the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

4. From Dante's evil plight there was no escape. His doom seemed inevitable. The valley ended in

The pass

Which never yet a living person left.

But no moralist or theologian would think of sin as a narrow pass. "Broad is the way." Sin may catch all in its toils, but surely Dante, with his reverence for the heroes of his faith, must have believed that from the universal wreck some, if only a few, had escaped. But death is universal, inevitable, and solitary. We must thread that pass in single file.

5. From ambiguous symbolism we pass to plain statement. In the second canto Lucia, who ought to know, tells Beatrice in so many words that it is Death that is fighting Dante:—

Dost thou not see the death that combats him,  
Beside that flood where ocean has no vaunt.

*Inf.*, ii. 107.

Here we must be on our guard. We must not yield to the temptation to identify the flood of our second line with the idea of "Death's cold flood" of a familiar hymn. Neither must we drag in that line of the ninetieth Psalm, "Thou carriest them away as with a flood." In the Prayer Book Psalter, in the Septuagint, and, what is more to the point, in the Vulgate, which was Dante's Bible, this simile is wanting. But, dismissing the flood which has proved almost as difficult to commentators as to Dante himself, we return to the first line, which seems decisive enough. Not sin, but death, combats him. The encounter with the wolf is an encounter with death.

6. Now we come to the *bête noir* of the *Divine Comedy*—if a greyhound can be so described—the Veltro of the first canto. Of this perplexing animal one Dantist has the hardihood to say that not even Dante himself knew what he meant by him. We admire the blasphemy, and envy the blasphemer, but we dare not imitate him. Happily we are concerned only with the action of the hound, and not with his character. According to Virgil he is to drive the she-wolf back to Hell:—

Thro' every city shall he hunt her down  
Until he shall have driven her back to Hell,  
There from whence Envy first did let her  
loose.

For an explanation of these lines the editors agree in sending us to the Book of Wisdom,

which to Dante was Holy Writ. There we are told that by envy of the devil Death entered into the world (Death, not sin, as one eminent living English Dantist quotes it—misled for a moment by the traditional interpretation). Unless Dante is wantonly perverting Scripture, the identification is unmistakable and beyond all question. The *Divine Comedy* says that the she-wolf was sent forth by envy. The Book of Wisdom says that by envy Death entered into the world.

7. The wolf is beyond measure greedy. So is death. In Scripture and out of Scripture the theme is commonplace and I need not weary you with trite quotations. Let one suffice. It is from Habakkuk : “Who enlargeth his desire as Sheol [*Infernus* in Vulgate] and he is as death, and cannot be satisfied.” There, surely, we have our wolf to a hair.

Many are the living creatures to which she is wed.—*Inf.*, i. 100.

This is true enough of death. All animals are mortal ; but not all animals are guilty of mortal sins.

From her, as from the valley, there is no escape. She

Suffers not any one to pass her way,  
But so doth harass him that she destroys him  
*Inf.*, i. 95, 96.

We all admit that avarice is a great evil ; but surely some misers have been saved.

This inevitableness, when applied to avarice, seems exaggerated. Of Death it is, of course, true enough.

Thus far we have, I think, found a fair and unforced interpretation of our two cantos.

The season and the scenery, the psychology and the symbolism, the echoes and the paraphrases of Scripture, and the direct evidence of Lucia, all with one consent point in one direction and guide us to the conclusion that the primary thought of the first canto is of man's mortality rather than of the sin which causes it.

The other beasts seem to have left Dante pretty much alone, and we will be as kind to them. But I must quote one verse of Scripture which seems quite to the point. "When lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Here we have a trinity of evil very like Dante's. Lust, pardlike in its beauty and witchery; Sin, Satanic and leonine, seeking what it can devour; Death, wolfish in appetite, insatiable as the grave.

The three hindrances are said to be Luxury, Pride and Avarice. Then the question naturally arises, Whose luxury? whose pride? or whose avarice? And the answer in each case is the same. It must be Dante's own luxury, pride and avarice that were destroying Dante's soul. Consequently, in the first canto Dante admits that he was lustful, proud, and avaricious.

We need not discuss the vexed question of Dante's youthful morals. Proud he was, and vicious he may have been. But does he mean to tell us that avarice was his fatal stumbling block and most ruinous sin? We must not shift our ground and say that it was his own vice and pride and some one else's avarice. We must not transfer the guilt to Florence or Rome. Either it was his own love of money and greed of gain that barred his way to a higher life, or we must say that, somehow or other, through the avarice of the merchants of Florence or of the Court of Rome, he lost his innocence, and was in imminent danger of eternal perdition. Was Dante a miser? Is such a supposition tenable? Can we reconcile it with what we know of him, with his fierce denunciations of avarice in others (so hypocritical if he himself was an avaricious person); with that ideal of his character which inevitably creates itself in our own minds? I think not. Then in the first canto he is not dealing with particular and concrete sins; or if he is, he fails to show in what relation they stand to his own life-history.

And now for the crux of my theory. Elsewhere the Wolf stands for avarice. Granted. But Dante's symbolism is not stereotyped, labelled and mechanical. It is free and spontaneous. The sun, for example, in the first canto is part of the created universe. But elsewhere it is the

symbol of Deity, of the Pope, of the Emperor, and of Beatrice. There is a wood in the opening canto; there is a wood in the suicides' Hell; there is a wood in the Earthly Paradise. But these three woods are not the same wood. Neither is the she-wolf of the first canto identical with the he-wolf — Plutus or Pluto — of the seventh canto.

But in the *Purgatory* there are lines that are hard to reconcile with our interpretation. In a fierce invective against avarice Dante directly refers us back to our original she-wolf. He says:—

Accursed mayst thou be, thou old she-wolf,  
That more than all the other beasts hast prey  
Because of hunger infinitely hollow !

. . . . .  
When will he come through whom she shall depart?—*Purg.* xx. 10-15.

The reference to the episode of the greyhound and the wolf is clear enough. Is the objection fatal? Must we fall back on that favourite plea—valid enough—that Dante still awaits his *Oedipus*? Or shall we say that the solution is involved in the insoluble problem of the greyhound? In any case, the difficulty is not of our making, any more than the knot is of our untying. Dean Plumptre suggests that the lines concerning the greyhound are a subsequent insertion (of course by Dante himself), and I confess that I never read the first canto

without receiving an impression that the Dean was right. Certainly the "wherefore" with which Dante resumes in line 112

(Wherefore I think and judge it for the best  
Thou follow me and I will be thy guide)

flows more naturally and easily on the main current of Virgil's speech if we leave the Veltro episode entirely out. If such a suggestion can by any possibility be admitted, it is also within the limits of possibility that in the course of years Dante found new meanings in his world of symbols.

But when once we have let the greyhound loose on a difficulty we have little shame in confessing that it is too much for us.

To sum up—the first canto is steeped and saturated with fear. Dante is about to explore the secrets of the unknown realm of the King of Terrors. His sensitive, imaginative mind quails at the prospect. His journey is exceptional. Only two have gone that way before him while still in the flesh. Æneas had visited the underworld of shades. St. Paul had been caught up into Paradise. But neither of them had trodden—as Dante was about to tread—that dark pass and completed the journey through

The lowest depths of Hell,  
Through every paradise and through all glory.

He was on the verge of an experience that was without a parallel in human his-

tory. What wonder that his courage failed, or that he asked whether he was equal to the task. He was not an *Aeneas* or a *Paul*. Sorely did his wearied virtue need *Virgil's* comfort and the assurance which *Virgil* gave him that the things he dreaded were not really fearful. His terror was misplaced.

Of those things only should one be afraid  
Which have the power of doing others harm;  
Of the rest, no; because they are not fearful.

He is called to an honourable enterprise. He is to fathom the mysteries of eternity and unfold the secrets of man's final destiny. To accomplish this he must taste the bitterness of death; and to him, as to all men who accept the Christian revelation, the sting of death is sin. How a sinless *Dante* would have approached the portals of his *Inferno* we can only imagine; but to him, living as he did in the Middle Ages, the four last things—Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven—could never be dissociated from one another. It was his mission to explain eternity to the children of time, and, that he might fulfil his prophetic office he must cross the boundary. It was necessary that in spirit he should die. Otherwise he could never tell the race what is the true meaning and inwardness of Death. During that awful night in the Valley of the Shadow, *Dante* was tasting the bitterness of death.

## DANTE

A LECTURE BY THE REV. W. BOYD CARPENTER,  
M.A., VICAR OF CHRIST CHURCH, LANCASTER  
GATE, W. (NOW THE RIGHT HON. AND RIGHT  
REV. LORD BISHOP OF RIPON); READ BEFORE  
THE DANTE SOCIETY, NOVEMBER 14TH, 1883.  
THE VERY REV. E. H. PLUMPTRE, D.D.,  
DEAN OF WELLS, IN THE CHAIR.\*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

There are two things that go to make up human life, and if you will pardon me I will describe these. One is, the power of suffering. We sometimes murmur at suffering; we say we should produce so much better fruit if we were left to a free course. That may be our notion, but I cannot help thinking that this power of suffering works good in life, and creates often its largest forces. We know how Shelley tells us that men were cradled into song by suffering, and we may question, if the life of Milton had flowed on evenly and pleasantly, whether we should have had *Paradise Lost*. We cannot tell how much we owe to this suffering in life, which has really brought out of men their noblest powers, for "What are we," as Bishop Hall said, "but the keys of some fine instrument

\* This Lecture is printed as reported in Shorthand at the time of its delivery.

which the Divine Hand touches ; and some are pressed down and some are raised up." But I would add to it—What is that finger which touches the note, and makes the melody to well forth but the Divine finger of suffering ?

But suffering is not a power of itself. Eternal force is little unless met by power within ; and therefore I hold it is only half a truth to say that to the factions of Florence we owe the poems of Dante. If you mean by it that exile which gave him the leisure for his mind, then it is a truth ; but even then it is a fact that no man will sing through suffering unless he first be taught to sing by love. You cannot move forward in life unless you have an energy within. The stream will not find its way to the sea, unless it has not alone the banks that hedge it in, but also the force of the spring, far above in the everlasting hills. So with Dante's poem ; it is not born of suffering alone, but of love in her three best and strongest forces. Love, as it dawns on us in youthful fancy, love as it dawns after man begins to perceive that he is made for something more than toying with the tresses of a maiden's hair, to be of use in the life we are living ; and finally the highest, another love that shall bring these two together and make them one.

You will see the power and influence of these three loves in the story of Dante ; and no man will ever understand the depth of

Dante's poem who has not first fathomed the depth of Dante's heart.

Now, one very wise suggestion made by Carlyle was this, that if you want to understand a man, the first thing you must do is to get his likeness. We are fortunate, and are able to look upon one of the early and youthful representations of Dante. Mr. Seymour, working in Florence, discovered a fresco painting upon the walls, and we owe to him its careful preservation. And to another Englishman, Lord Vernon, to whom all lovers of Dante owe more, perhaps, than to any of his contemporaries, because he consecrated the energy of life and fortune to the recovery and preservation of this poet's works, and enshrined them in that magnificent edition which is to be found, alas, only in the libraries of the great. In the painting thus preserved we have the very best portrait of Dante, for it is from the hand of Giotto, and it is the picture of comparative youth. Here is the face before life has begun very hardly to touch it ; and I do not care to see his face afterwards, because I want to see what manner of man he was before the world had begun to mark him. It is a face which is of high intellect, but with a certain imperiousness of disposition ; a pride too is there, but a wondrous sensitiveness lingers about the mouth and chin ; of whom you can say that he is a man capable of something great, capable of thinking greatly,

capable of feeling greatly, and of suffering greatly, and being too proud to speak, is therefore capable of the most acute of all sufferings, that of suffering silently. And capable of deep and tender love also.

Now, let us keep this face in mind, for it is the face of one who is to be flung into the midst of the world. What kind of world was it that Dante was flung into? And here you will pardon me, I am sure, if I go back a little, because we cannot understand a man if we do not remember something of his time and of his age.

Three hundred years had passed, which had been an age of comparative quietness for Florence, and although there had been a slight growth in the development of commerce and art, yet still there was not that leaping forward in the future which was developed afterwards. Before the reign of Frederick II., which broke up a new path, and opened up new opportunities to the commercial world, there were two great parties in Florence. The Ghibellines believed that they gained by the patronage of the emperors. They believed that the shadow of the emperor gave them not merely protection, but also a guarantee of influence. The Guelphs, to whom freedom was more than protection, felt otherwise. The contention of the Guelphs was that all bargains between those who were strong and those who were very weak ended in the complete suppression of the very weak.

In their fear of the emperors, they leaned upon the power of the Pope. For a time, during the reign of Frederick II., the Ghibelline cause was triumphant. But the very moment that the sceptre fell from Frederick II.'s hands, naturally the Guelphs' hopes began to rise. Now the emperor was gone it had dropped into weaker hands, and now was the opportunity for those who loved freedom. The Guelphs rose and swept the Ghibellines from Florence, but they were not going to be despoiled of their rule.

The Ghibellines allied themselves with Manfred of Naples, and the result was, one of those sad episodes in the history of Florence which Dante never spoke of without scorn. Farinata degli Uberti, a man described as the best military leader of his time—strong in counsel, he was able to hold his own with his nobles, and with the populace ; under his guidance, and under his diplomacy, the plan was arranged to restore the Ghibelline authority in Florence, and on the field of Monte Aperto a battle was fought. But the Guelphs would not have fallen so easily had there not been treachery in the camp. That traitor was Bocca degli Abatti. The mercenary troops pressed into the midst of Florence. Florence had led the van in commerce in this period of liberty ; and envious men, devoid of honour, were ready to sacrifice Florence to their own interests. But Farinata was

not one to tread under his heel the very home he loved so well ; and he spoke against the overturn of Florence—he saved her buildings ; but he did not save her from a German occupation. For a time it looked as if the power of the Ghibellines was invincible in Florence ; but across the sea was moving a force that was to disturb them. Charles of Anjou appears.

In 1265 the battle of Benevento was fought, Manfred was vanquished, the Guelphs arose, and the power of the Ghibellines was broken. The fierce hate of the victors was directed against Farinata ; they forgot his generosity when he pleaded for the saving of the city, and they ordered his house to be razed to the ground ; and though more than 600 years have passed away, not one stone of his house has ever been rebuilt. From that hour the Guelphs were in power, and the young poet was born into the midst of these stormy scenes. The power of the Pope and the power of these factions were at conflict. To call him the poet of the Ghibelline faction is to contradict facts. To call him anything but the poet of Florence is to misconceive the whole meaning of his political career. He was not the spokesman of a party. Ghibelline and wealth, what were they to him ? Florence was all in all to him. That was his spirit, and I do not wonder that it was burnt into him when he saw how Florence suffered. This was the spirit in which he

lived. But pause for one moment. What were the home surroundings of his life? What was his education like? I can only lightly touch upon it. The man by whom his education was guided was a man of aspirations, and a thinker. He was a free-thinker, an aspirant after nobler and better things of his day.

You may understand the character and nature of his teacher Brunetto Latini by the following incident: Being accused once of having fraudulently appropriated moneys, he found that he had made a blunder in his accounts, and rather than admit that he had made a mistake, he preferred to suffer under the accusation of fraud. Such was his teacher. But education does not consist merely in books. When he was nine years of age there came upon him what was the dawn of one revelation of his life. Beatrice Portinari, then a little child, was afterwards to be the little child-angel who mingled with his dreams. We sometimes speak of love lightly. We speak of it as we watch it beginning to break upon young lives, and speak of it with a covert smile; it is commented on with mirth—but not, I think, quite seemly mirth; we make a joke where we ought rather, I think, to hold our peace; for it seems to me that if love be aught it must be everything, and to treat it lightly, with even well-intentioned mirth, is neither wise nor well. Love was everything in Dante's life; it was the dream

that was the guiding-star of his life ; to him it was no mere lightsome fancy—no mere fanciful thought, but rather like that when the spirit changes eyes with the kindred spirits, and knows that it is no longer alone in the world, but itself joined with another. And from that hour in Dante's life—through every evil, of various forms, when she, dear child that he loved, is laid in the dust, still she is always his light of love. Nine years had rolled on, and again Beatrice Portinari had appeared to him, not this time as a little child, but as a girl in the beauty of her springtide of life. She is clothed in white, she speaks ; he worships at a distance.

The days come when she is smitten with sickness, they are the days of long anxiety ; Dante treads the streets of Florence, and listens for tidings from the sick chamber, and still ever the sad and mournful answer comes back, till at length, like a sudden blow—for whenever such sorrows come they are sudden—she is gone, and the light is gone out of his love. The first dream of his love is vanished, and to him, with that wondrous force of feeling which moves through all his dreams, to him it seems as though the light had gone out of this great world. The people are moving through the streets of Florence ; yet he heeds them not ; the busy men are going to carry on their commerce or their statesmanship, but to Dante the city sits solitary because to

him the light is gone out of his love. So love and suffering have joined hand in hand to close the first book of his life.

What is the effect of sorrow upon the heart which is high, and beats freely ? Sorrow is like the call of the angel, "Step up higher," but it is not given to every man to obey. Let us remember ourselves, lest we also be tempted. When that love dropped out of his life, he had no other. It was gone, and what had he to live for ? Now his life is to be a life of recklessness and even of vice. The sorrow cries, "I will find some solace in pleasure ; I will find some satisfaction, anything,—anything to shut out the memory of this loss." It was the dark epoch in Dante's life. No man goes from the wicket-gate to the heights of Beulah but he must pass through the Valley fo the Shadow of Death. No man walks from the cradle to the grave but must have his Valley of the Shadow of Death. And if Dante found a Valley of the Shadow of Death as in later years he wandered an exile over the heights of Italy, he had gone through another Valley of the Shadow of Death in early life ; this must be remembered. That Valley of the Shadow of Death was the Valley of recklessness, of self-indulgence, and folly. It swept in between that early life and that dark loneliness which must be the close of life.

Now, Dante could not exist in feeding merely upon the husks of life ; you soon

find him building up for himself a new love, and this time he says, "My love shall be my Florence," and the vision arises again upon his life, which teaches him not to serve himself, but to serve his country. He has found out one unriddling of life. No man can find happiness and peace as long as he is living for himself. He felt he had found a worthy object to which to devote his powers. He came to Florence. I do not wonder, when he came into her once more, that he felt a love for her, and felt a pride when he found his Florence that he had left as it were a beautiful child, grown up in strength and stature. She had spread out her resources, until half the world depended on her. Florence had aided the advancement of commerce ; she had started a new epoch in finance. The rulers of those days had divers ways of meeting the want of funds ; they could tamper with the coinage, and so replenish their coffers. The Florentines, to ensure fixity in the currency, produced a new coinage, of 22-carat gold, a drachm in weight, bearing the impress of the Florentine lily upon it. This, the first florin, was made to circulate in Europe. The cloths of Florence, too, were to be found in all the markets of Europe. Splendid buildings adorned her streets ; the genius of Arnolfo and the brush of Giotto were adding new glories to the town. Yet even now we find that factions had been at work. The Ghibellines had

vanished ; but still humanity splits itself so constantly, that if you cannot find one section arrayed against another, you will find that the section left in power will divide itself. And so the division will go on, I suppose, to the end.

The difference between the new factions was the difference between pride and wealth. There were some who were blessed with the splendid heritage of a noble name, they boasted of their family, their property had slipped through their fingers, but the proud family name still remained. But there were others in Florence ; the men who, springing from the ranks, had accumulated wealth for themselves. Feuds arose between the Bianchi, or Whites, and the Neri, or Blacks—the former vain of their wealth and resenting the patronage of the latter. The result was that more embassies were sent to the Pope. They forget their former lesson, and cannot see that it is in vain to ask the wolf to come in and settle the quarrels of the rabbit-warren.

Dante's policy seems to me to be plain. He is accused of partiality in the way in which he used his power. He was one of the *Priori* of the city. His truest friend will be banished, and his brother-in-law of the opposite party will also be banished ; and when you read words in which he sings of his love for Florence, you can see that he was resolved at all costs to break down

these factions that were destroying her. She lost her power, because she yielded herself to the spirit of partisanship.

The efforts made by Dante were not to be successful. Celestine V. had been succeeded by Boniface VIII. Celestine had been brought from the quiet retirement of a hermit-life to rule over the great Church of Rome, but whatever might have been the motives at work with the College of Cardinals when they chose for their head a man of piety, they forgot one necessary thing: and that is, that piety may be a very good thing in its way, but you do not always find it true that a man of piety is therefore a man of capacity. It is not disrespect to say that God gives one gift to one person, and the other to another. And so Celestine had that diffidence and timidity which belong to a man who has had no experience of the world, and he found himself on the Papal throne, and surrounded by intrigue, the interests of Germany against those of France, and the interests of the nobles against the lower classes, till his poor hermit's brain was puzzled how he could gather up the threads of government and administer it aright. Boniface was a man of ambition, a man of weight, and he contrived an artifice to get Celestine to vacate the Papal chair. He arranged that as poor Celestine retired for the night after some long conclave, perhaps, where religious and political matters were discussed, voices

should be heard, crying “Celestine, resign.” Celestine was thus made to resign, and Boniface became Pope ; and if he had not the piety of his predecessor, he had more vigour. He thought the White party were willing to sacrifice everything for peace. He said, “Give me men, not women,” and they knew then very well that he had chosen for the “Black” party, and they knew also that the French power would interfere in Florence. To save her from foreign intervention, Dante goes to the Papal throne itself. But during his absence the faction triumph ; the doors of Florence are closed against him, and never more must he set foot across the threshold of Florence. This, the second love of his life, is gone. Though we cry “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” when all we love melts at our touch, yet love works out her work on larger plan. Beatrice may die, and Florence may die for him ; he may be an exile ; but there still is light and love to visit his soul. The old love and the old city may go ; the new love, and the new city which hath foundations, may be revealed.

The poem of Dante comes in as an explanation of life’s purpose. Time would fail me to speak of that poem. It was not one of partisanship ; it was not the poem of the Ghibellines ; still less was it the exposition of a peculiar theology. Doubtless he was a theologian, and had his notions, but

these are appendages of the poem, and not the poem itself. The power of it is that it is intensely personal. You who have read Milton's *Paradise Lost* have read it without any feeling of Milton's presence, but as you go through Dante's poem you have the consciousness that you are going with the man. The spirit of this man sang of the *Inferno* because he had been there; he sung of the *Purgatorio* because he had climbed its terraces; and he sang of *Paradiso* because some glimpse of its glory had dropped into his life. I want to call your attention to this—that at the opening of the poem what he insists on is that this journey was a necessity. There is the Hill of Delight, shining in the beams of the rising sun, beckoning him towards it, and he can climb it. It is a hill where you can find the true life. Why must he climb it? He may strive to move forward, but old vices bar his progress. That hill can only be climbed by one who has clean hands and a pure heart and who has not been given to vanity. He cannot climb that way to heaven; he must descend first to the lower parts of the earth. For him his way to heaven is right through hell. It is true of your life, and mine, and every one, and we should not forget it, that you can never go back but you must go downwards first. You cannot retrace the first steps of this life without passing through God's judgments. Dante must see these;

he must look evil in the face, and read its meaning.

The *Inferno* is the revelation of the hideousness of evil. And as he passes into the Inferno and through the dark gateway, you have the hint of this in the chronology of the poem. It extends over three days—beginning on the Good Friday and ending on the Easter morn. It is the hint that he who rises with Christ must die with Christ. When Dante prepares for the dread journey, the daylight is giving way to night. Is he strong enough and worthy enough to pass? *Æneas* may go; St. Paul may go; but he—dare he encounter it? Yes; the Divine light shines on the solitary wanderer, for no one shall be left unguided as he threads his way through the dark paths which even his own self-will and sin have doomed him to tread. But when he comes to his *Inferno*, how does he deal with sin? Those sins that are the results of indulgence he sees but slightly punished, but all the sins of deliberation are punishable with the hottest hand of heaven. The sin he sees to be the worst is the cold, calculating sin of fraud. It is bad to allow the sin of passion indulgence, but it is worst of all to gain an advantage at others' loss. Therefore it is he who has sinned from lust or greed that is in the upper circle—but you must descend into the evil depths of all to see those who have sinned against fidelity and truth; there shall be buried, in the

thick-ribbed ice, those who have betrayed their country for their own interests, or deceived their friends.

I look with dismay on the clock, because we have touched only the threshold of the subject. I can but ask you to see that the Poet has seen in the *Inferno* the true form of evil, and he has seen that it is hateful. Next he must show that the whole being must be revolutionized before men can begin to climb the rough and narrow way that leads to heaven. Dante must pass that Purgatory where all the marks and stains of that old life must be washed away with the dew of grace and put away all the old things. He must gird himself with the reed that grows by the water-side, the reed of humility, before he can climb into spiritual perfection ; he must be guided by angels to the gate. The angel sits upon his diamond throne, with the bare sword, where under his feet were the three steps, of white and of black, and the last of red, as though human blood had been poured upon it. In these he sees the picture of his life. He must remember what he might have been ; he must look and see to what fire of passion has brought his life. He must tread the way of blood and flame—of pardon and purification. Seven P's were engraved on his brow by the angel. These seven P's are seven sins ; and these seven sins to be purged are pride, envy, anger, and that lukewarmness of disposition still more fatal,

avarice, gluttony, and lust ; these must be purged out. As he proceeds on his labour of climbing upward, the air trembles with song. They will climb up, and as they pass from terrace to terrace, the angels' wings will sweep away one of those marks. Blessed are the poor in spirit ; blessed are the meek, and blessed are the poor in heart. He climbs on until he reaches the last heaven ; and now mark, for again I ask you to see that the personal element of the story is clear. He has passed through all the six terraces of *Purgatorio*, and the seventh yet remains. Before him is a flame through which he must pass. How can he face it ? For a moment he seems to shrink, till at length he hears a voice, telling that beyond this wall of flame stands Beatrice ; then true love revives, and he passes through to the other side, and up the hill ; and when Beatrice chides him as a mother chides a child, he stands before her as a child that is come back and ashamed to look up. But now all is really at an end, and a sweet peace is dawning upon him, and he can mount upwards to the Paradise, where he shall learn many things that shall be explained to him. But the Poet must come back into the world again ; he has learnt through his journey that he must have dominion over himself before he enters into Paradise, and he will move onward warned by the burning impulse of that love.

I have done. Dante's poem deserves

studying, for various reasons. I say, read and admire and learn. Rossini once said, "I learnt more music from Dante than I learnt from all my masters." And one of the most famous orators of our land said, "I learnt more oratory from Dante than from the House of Commons." I say, admire him in his character, and follow the noble aspects of character which his life affords. Admire him as when they offered him a home once more in Florence if he would acknowledge that he had been wrong. Florence had been cruel to him, and he would not return if he was to return at the price of his disgrace. "No," he said; "this is not the way of returning to my country. If, however, any other offer shall be made now, or at a future time, that shall not detract from the honour and reputation of Dante, that offer I will accept with no tardy steps. But if by no such way can Florence be entered, Florence I will never enter. Can I not everywhere enjoy the sight of the sun and the stars?" Peace and comfort are not worth having if you sacrifice all to gain them. Admire him; but we must one and all follow him. His poem was the *Pilgrim's Progress* of the thirteenth century, the power of man's heart telling what was true of man in all ages, and telling us that God never forsakes humanity, but brings us through better ways, out into the world and out into the life of Himself.

## IL CANTO VI DEL PARADISO

**CONFERENZA DI SUA ECCELLENZA IL BARONE  
SIDNEY SONNINO, PRESIDENTE DEL CONSIGLIO  
DE' MINISTRI; LETTA ALLA DANTE SOCIETY  
DI LONDRA, IL 23 MARZO, 1906. LANCASTER  
OWEN, Esq., IN THE CHAIR.**

Nell' ultimo Canto Dante e Beatrice sono appena giunti nel cielo di Mercurio ;—intorno ad essi accorrono festanti le anime luminose ; e alla prima che premurosa si porge, Dante rivolge due domande : chi è ? e perchè si trova, o meglio si mostra nel secondo regno del Paradiso ?

Quello spirto, fattosi per letizia ancora più lucente (Dante da questo punto non ci

Baron Sidney Sonnino, a Member of the Dante Society, had very kindly promised to read this Lecture at the Meeting of January 30th ; but a political crisis in Italy obliged this eminent statesman to remain at his post in the Italian Parliament and to accept on that very day from the King of Italy the charge of forming a new Government, of which he has become the head and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He, however, sent me the MS. of his Lecture, which Signor Mariano Cerasoli had the honour of reading at a later meeting, as stated above.

LUIGI RICCI.

parlerà più di ombre o di figure, ma soltanto di luci, di splendori, di lumiere), gli risponde

Nel modo che 'l seguente Canto canta.

Con questa forma insolita, il Poeta viene ad incorniciare in modo speciale questo Canto VI come un tutto a sè.

Ed esso ci presenta, in realtà, alcuni tratti particolari. È l'unico della Commedia che sia tutto preso dal discorso di una sola persona, dal primo all'ultimo verso. Qui non una parola di Beatrice ; nessuna descrizione ; appena una similitudine. Vi si discorre soltanto di politica e di giustizia.

In compenso non abbiamo qui nulla di oscuro ; e nemmeno testi incerti o di dubbia interpretazione.

Meno nell'ultimo breve episodio di Romeo, tutti i nomi e gli eventi cui si allude sono tra i più universalmente noti. Una lunga serie di figure storicamente familiari, da Enea a Carlomagno, da Lucrezia a Cleopatra, ci sfila dinanzi in una rapida rassegna, intesa a dimostrazione di una tesi storica e politica, che infiammò tutto l'animo del Poeta.

Dante visse con intensa passione nelle lotte e negli avvenimenti del suo tempo ; le sue idee di ordinamento sociale e politico si collegavano strettamente con la sua fede religiosa, con tutte le sue convinzioni intorno e ai destini dell'umanità e alle leggi dell'universo.

Le caratteristiche dominanti del suo genio, già l'osservò il Carlyle, sono la intensità e

la sincerità. Le sue opinioni sono la sua vita ; sono insieme sentimenti e passioni. Il fuoco ardente della sua anima fonde ogni cosa in un tutto omogeneo ed armonico.

È questo essenzialmente il canto della Giustizia, considerata come base e fine di ogni ordinamento politico ;—e vi è mantenuta sempre viva la personalità dell' Imperatore legislatore che parla. La parola stessa di giustizia torna ripetutamente : Dio è la viva giustizia ; il segno dell'aquila non può dipartirsi dalla giustizia ; Romeo è il giusto.

Nel primo cielo del Paradiso si argomenta di libertà morale ; nel secondo di giustizia ; di amore nel terzo, in cui s'appunta l'estrema ombra della terra.

Il discorso di Giustiniano comincia con l'aquila, "l'uccel di Giove," che stende l'ampio volo dalla Troade a Roma e da Roma a Bisanzio, e termina col povero peregrino che erra tapinando di città in città.

Posciachè Constantin l'aquila volse  
Contra il corso del ciel, ch'ella seguiò  
Dietro all'antico che Lavinia tolse,  
Cento e cent'anni e più l'uccel di Dio  
Nello stremo d'Europa si ritenne,  
Vicino ai monti de' quai prima uscio ;

Dante, che pur concede a Costantino, "per la buona intenzion che fe' mal frutto," uno scanno nel sesto cielo, non trascura occasione per rimproverargli il trasporto

della sede dell' Impero da Roma a Bisanzio. "O felice popolo, o Italia gloriosa,—esclama nel libro *De Monarchia*,—se non fosse mai nato colui che indebolì il tuo imperio!"

Dante vedeva in quel trasporto una menomazione dei diritti e della dignità di Roma, una ragione di divisione e di indebolimento dell' Impero, e l' occasione ad una cessione (allora si credeva ancora all' autenticità del famoso atto di donazione), altrettanto pericolosa nel fatto che giuridicamente nulla, dei diritti imperiali al Pontefice.

Qui il ritorno dell' aquila,

.....il segno

Che fe' i Romani al mondo reverendi,  
da Occidente verso Oriente, è additato come  
contrario alle leggi e della natura e della  
storia, quali ci sono indicate dal corso del  
sole e dalla via seguita da Enea, "l' antico  
che Lavinia tolse," venuto da Troia in Italia  
per compiere la sua missione divina.

E sotto l'ombra delle sacre penne  
Governò il mondo lì di mano in mano,  
E sì cangiando in su la mia pervenne.

Cesare fui, e son Giustiniano,  
Che, per voler del primo amor ch' io sento,  
D' entro le leggi trassi il troppo e il vano.

La luce nascosta nel proprio raggio si  
nomina, rispondendo alla prima domanda  
di Dante. È l' anima di Giustiniano, per la  
memoria del quale il nostro Poeta nutriva  
una particolare venerazione, come di chi  
aveva ristorato il dominio imperiale in

Italia, racconciandole il freno, con l'annientamento della Monarchia Ostrogota.

Accanto ai ricordi di Teodorico, Dante aveva dinanzi agli occhi in Ravenna, mentre scriveva questi canti del Paradiso, i grandi monumenti erettivi da Giustiniano, e la stessa immagine di lui ritratta nei bellissimi mosaici della chiesa di San Vitale; e queste solenni memorie dovevano contribuire ad ingigantire nella mente sua la figura storica dell'Imperatore

Sopra la qual doppio lume s' addua.

Giustiniano non aveva soltanto trionfato delle armi barbare; aveva anche date le leggi civili al mondo, mediante l'opera mirabile di riordinamento e di riduzione del Diritto Romano, stringendo nel *Corpus Juris Civilis* entro i confini di cinquanta libri la materia di diecimila; alto lavoro ispiratogli, secondo il pensiero del Poeta, da Dio, come un ulteriore passo, dopo quelli di Cesare, di Augusto e di Tiberio, verso la unificazione del genere umano sotto l'Impero e la Chiesa.

E prima ch' io all' opra fossi attento,  
Una natura in Cristo esser, non più  
Credeva, e di tal fede era contento;

Ma il benedetto Agapito che fue  
Sommo pastore, alla fede sincera  
Mi dirizzò con le parole sue.

Io gli credetti, e ciò che in sua fede era  
Veggio ora chiaro, sì come tu vedi  
Ogni contraddizion e falsa e vera.

cioè come un vero non dimostrato, ma per sè noto.

Dante riteneva, seguendo in ciò l'autorità di Brunetto Latini, che Giustiniano fosse stato distolto dalla eresia degli Eutichiani o Monofisiti, che negavano la doppia natura di Cristo, per opera del Papa Agapito, andato a bella posta da Roma a Bisanzio. Il credo Eutichiano è quello professato ancora oggi dagli Abissini e dalla Chiesa copta in Egitto.

Storicamente non risulta che Giustiniano fosse mai Monofisita.

A ogni modo quel che importa al nostro Poeta è di far risaltare che la grande opera legislativa fu ispirata all' Imperatore dallo Spirto Santo, il che non avrebbe potuto avvenire finchè egli si fosse trovato in qualsiasi guisa macchiato di eresia:

Tosto che con la Chiesa mossi i piedi,  
A Dio per grazia piacque di spirarmi  
L'alto lavoro, e tutto in lui mi diedi.

E forse più ancora preme qui a Dante, nell'accingersi a parlare della missione storica dell'Impero, di mettere in rilievo la doppia natura, terrena e celeste, umana e divina, del Redentore, in quanto da essa, per quella singolare importanza dialettica e sentimentale che il Medio Evo annetteva alle analogie, ai simboli e alle assomiglianze simmetriche, egli traeva un argomento di più a favore della sua tesi della diretta

derivazione da Dio così dell' Impero come della Chiesa.

*Ed al mio Belisar commendai l'armi,  
Cui la destra del ciel fu sì congiunta,  
Che segno fu ch' io dovessi posarmi.*

Giustiniano qui tace affatto della disgrazia (che in realtà durò solo pochi mesi) in cui cadde presso di lui Belisario, il quale, secondo la comune leggenda popolare, accusato di cospirazione e cacciato da ogni ufficio, sarebbe stato ridotto a mendicare, vecchio e cieco, per le vie di Costantinopoli: "date obolum Belisario."

Le cronache medioevali non fanno cenno di ciò. Villani dice che nell' anno 565 "Giustiniano imperadore e Belisario morirono bene avventurosamente." Vari commentatori quindi suppongono che Dante non avesse notizia di tale tradizione.

Appare però singolare che metta per l'appunto in bocca a Giustiniano, in questo stesso Canto, tutta la storia di Romeo, la quale per molti rispetti ricorda quella di Belisario; e la coincidenza sembrerebbe piuttosto indicare che Dante non prestasse fede alla leggenda popolare e volesse qui implicitamente purgare la memoria del grande Imperatore da ogni sospetto di ingratitudine o di ingiustizia.

*Or qui alla question prima s' appunta  
La mia risposta ; ma sua condizione  
Mi stringe a seguitare alcuna giunta ;*

Perchè tu veggi con quanta ragione  
 Si move contra il sacrosanto segno,  
 E chi l's' appropria, e chi a lui s' oppone.  
 Vedi quanta virtù l' ha fatto degno  
 Di riverenza.....

L'aquila romana che nei primi versi del Canto varca i continenti e i mari, qui spiega le ali per risalire, con volo ancor più largo, il corso di venti secoli di storia.

Non è di diritto, afferma Dante, che ciò che si conforma alla evidente volontà divina, e questa volontà si rivela nella storia. Essere predestinato il popolo romano a reggere l'imperio universale per la sua nobiltà, nobiltà di origine antica e gloriosa, cantata da Virgilio, e nobiltà di secolari virtù. Perciò a diritto sottomise l'universo mondo.

L'idea della predestinazione del popolo di Roma a reggitore del mondo, dominò le menti in Italia per secoli; fu essa l'ispiratrice di Arnaldo da Brescia come di Cola Di Rienzo.

Vedi quanta virtù l' ha fatto degno  
 Di riverenza !

Dante era un idealista: per lui il bene non può venir dal male; la forza vera non scaturisce durevolmente che dalla virtù. E in mezzo al continuo e confuso avvicendarsi degl' istituti e degli ordinamenti sociali, delle opinioni e delle credenze, rimane pur sempre vero che i soli materiali con cui si costruiscano e si cementino solidamente i

grandi edifici nella storia della umanità sono il valore e il sacrificio individuale; valore che s' ispiri ad un alto ideale, sacrificio che suoni abnegazione libera e volontaria di fronte ad un interesse generale, mossa da fede e da amore; non negazione di coscienze in una comune e snervante servitù.

A torto, parmi, il Balbo, parlando delle dimostrazioni storiche che il nostro Poeta dà a sostegno della sua tesi imperialista, irrompe in questo aspro giudizio: "Vedasi a quale assurdità tragga la ricerca dei fatti a prova di un cattivo argomento. Qui un fatto è provato buono solamente da ciò che è succeduto."

Nel considerare Dante non dobbiamo volerlo "appropriare a parte," come egli accusa i Ghibellini di fare del segno imperiale. Non dobbiamo voler nemmeno, con un anacronismo degno della scolastica medioevale, attribuire a lui una mentalità tutta propria del secolo nostro. Le teoriche di ordinamento politico non possono in ogni periodo storico, per quanta varietà presentino tra loro, non essere tutte imbevute dell' ambiente generale del tempo, non essere in corrispondenza con tutto il resto della vita intellettuale, morale e civile, con le idee correnti intorno alla natura e all'uomo, al mondo esterno e a quello interno o della coscienza.

Nel Medio Evo il pensiero dell'intervento diretto e volontario della divinità in ogni

singolo fatto umano pervadeva tutta la vita sociale. Nessuno metteva in dubbio la ragionevolezza del giudizio di Dio, ossia del duello giudiziario, ed esso doveva valere per gli Stati a più forte ragione che per gl' individui. "È stolta cosa,"—dice Dante,— "il pensare che le forze che Dio conforta possano riuscire inferiori nella pugna." È sempre lo stesso concetto che dominò anche tutta la Storia sacra; ogni sconfitta è segno dell'ira del Signore, ogni vittoria una approvazione del cielo.

A Dante appariva evidente che tutta la storia dell'umanità, fin dalle prime origini, indicasse la chiara volontà di Dio di esaltare Roma, e di farne la sede dei due grandi suoi Vicariati, l'Impero e il Papato, le due spade e insieme i due soli del mondo, l'uno inteso a dirizzare l'umana generazione secondo gli ammaestramenti filosofici alla felicità temporale, l'altro secondo le rivelazioni a quella spirituale.

Il Gran Veglio dell'isola di Saturno, raffigurante l'umanità nel suo svolgimento storico,

.....Tien volte le spalle inver Damiata  
E Roma guarda sì come suo speglio.

Giustiniano comincia l'enumerazione dei fatti storici illustrativi degli alti destini dell'aquila romana, "il segno del mondo e dei suoi duci," staccando il racconto dal punto dove lo lasciò il poema Virgiliano,

che chiude con la morte di Turno, ucciso  
da Enea per vendicare Pallante :—

.....E cominciò dall' ora  
Che Pallante morì per dargli regno.

Tu sai che fece in Alba sua dimora  
Per trecent' anni ed oltre, infino al fine  
Che i tre ai tre pugnar per lui ancora.

cioè gli Orazi e i Curiazi. “ E non pose  
Iddio le mani proprie,— così Dante nel  
*Convito*,— alla battaglia dove gli Albani  
colli Romani dal principio per lo capo del  
regno combattèro, quando uno solo Romano  
nelle mani ebbe la franchigia di Roma ? ”

E sai ch' ei fe' dal mal delle Sabine  
Al dolor di Lucrezia in sette regi,  
Vincendo intorno le genti vicine.

Sai quel ch' ei fe', portato dagli egregi  
Romani incontro a Brenno, incontro a Pirro,  
E contra gli altri principi e colleghi :

Onde Torquato, e Quinzio che dal cirro  
Negletto fu nomato,.....

“ Cincinnato dall' inculta chioma ” lo chiama  
Petrarca,

.....I Decii e i Fabi  
Ebber la fama che volentier mirro,  
cioè onoro, incenso.

Esso atterrò l' orgoglio degli Aràbi,  
Che diretro ad Annibale passaro  
L' alpestre rocce di che, Po, tu labi.

Sott' esso giovinetti trionfaro  
Scipione e Pompeo, ed a quel colle  
Sotto il qual tu nascesti, parve amaro.

I ricordi dei danni incontrati da Fiesole, per aver ospitato Catilina ribelle, e, qualche verso più giù, anche quelli di Modena e di Perugia per aver resistito ad Augusto, appariscono nel discorso imperiale come tanti aspri moniti alla guelfa Firenze, cui Dante non sa perdonare la fiera opposizione mossa ad Arrigo VII durante la sua discesa in Italia. "Che vi gioverà"—esclamava nella sua epistola ai Fiorentini del marzo 1311—"l'esservi circondati di fossi, l'avervi armati di baluardi e di torri, quando vi sopraggiunga la terribile aquila d'oro?"

Poi, presso al tempo che tutto il ciel volle  
 Ridur lo mondo a suo modo sereno,  
 Cesare per voler di Roma il tolle :

Si noti quel "per voler di Roma," che si aggiunge al volere del cielo. Dante scarta ogni idea di usurpazione o di violenza;—la elevazione di Cesare è voluta dal popolo romano; e insieme da Dio, la costituzione dell'Impero essendo condizione e strumento di pace nel mondo. Perciò il Poeta impreca a Bruto e a Cassio; perciò mette Cesare accanto ad Enea nel Limbo con gli spiriti magni, pur condannando tra i seminatori di civili discordie colui che lo sprondò a varcare il Rubicone, il venale Curio, "ch' a dicer fu così ardito."

Nel Medio Evo era comune in Italia la teoria che al popolo di Roma spettasse normalmente e legittimamente il diritto di elezione dell'Imperatore, e che ai principi

germanici fosse stata soltanto ceduta tale facoltà da un supposto decreto di Gregorio V. Così narra San Tommaso; così Matteo Villani: "Il popolo romano"—dice questi,—"non da sè, ma la Chiesa per lui concedette la elezione degli Imperadori a sette principi della Magna."

Segue la stupenda descrizione delle vittorie fulminee di Cesare, che già vedemmo celebrate dal grido degli accidiosi nel Purgatorio.

E quel ch' ei fe' dal Varo infino al Reno  
Isara vide ed Era, e vide Senna  
Ed ogni valle onde Rodano è pieno.

Quel che fe' poi ch' egli uscì di Ravenna  
E saltò 'l Rubicon, fu di tal volo  
Che nol seguiterla lingua nè penna.

In vêr la Spagna rivolse lo stuolo ;  
Poi vêr Durazzo, e Farsalia percosse  
Sì ch' al Nil caldo si sentì del duolo.  
Antandro e Simoenta, onde si mosse,

onde si mosse l' aquila con Enea, quando questi, imbarcandosi, portò con sè le immagini degli Dei di Pergamo, come ci narra Virgilio,

Antandro e Simoenta, onde si mosse,  
Rivide, e là dov' Ettore si cuba ;  
E mal per Tolommeo poi si riscosse !  
Da indi scese folgorando a Juba ;  
Poscia si volse nel vostro Occidente  
Dove sentia la Pompeiana tuba.

Juba è il re Numida che aveva ospitato Catone e i suoi poco dopo la battaglia di

Farsalia ;—“il vostro occidente,” cioè l’occidente di Dante, è la Spagna, dove Cesare sconfisse i figli di Pompeo, terminando così la guerra civile durata quattro anni.

E siamo arrivati ad Augusto, il “baiulo” o portainsegna dell’ aquila, che fondò definitivamente l’ Impero. Baiulo dell’ Impero, “*romanae rei bajulus*” chiama Dante Arrigo VII nella lettera ai Fiorentini.

Di quel che fe’ col baiulo seguente  
 Bruto con Cassio nell’ inferno latra,  
 E Modena e Perugia fu dolente;

Veramente il latrare di Bruto non consuona con quanto ci è stato detto di lui nell’ Inferno: “Vedi come si storce e non fa motto.” Evidentemente deve prendersi qui nel senso in cui Petrarca ci dice: “la doglia mia la qual tacendo i’ grido.”

Piangene ancor la triste Cleopatra,  
 Che, fuggendogli innanzi, dal colubro  
 La morte prese subitana ed atra.

Con costui corse fino al lito rubro ;  
 Con costui pose il mondo in tanta pace,  
 Che fu serrato a Jano il suo delubro.

L’ Impero è costituito ;—la pace regna per la prima volta sulla terra ;—e nasce il Redentore.

Nella contemporaneità di questi eventi d’ importanza mondiale, Dante ravvisa la prova del nuovo ordine unitario voluto da Dio nelle cose terrene e nelle spirituali.

Ancora nel secolo decimosettimo troviamo lo stesso concetto esposto da Bossuet: “Dieu

qui avait résolu de rassembler dans le même temps le peuple nouveau de toutes les nations, a premièrement réuni les terres et les mers sous ce même empire." E parlando di Augusto: "Tout l'univers est en paix sous sa puissance et Jésus Christ vient au monde."

L'aspirazione alla unità politica, religiosa, civile dell'umanità scaturiva come logica conseguenza da tutto quanto costituiva la vita morale ed intellettuale del Medio Evo, dalla filosofia, dalla religione, dalla scienza e dalla storia.

L'universo intero aveva per centro la terra, intorno alla quale giravano il sole, i pianeti, le stelle fisse, tutto l'empireo. La figurazione geocentrica del cosmos portava naturalmente al concetto di un Dio antropomorfo, cioè fatto ad immagine nostra;—l'uomo diventava l'ultima parola della creazione, la finalità stessa dell'universo.

Le nozioni che si avevano del nostro globo, come quelle del cielo, erano ancora le stesse di dodici secoli prima.

Il mondo conosciuto aveva confini molto ristretti, e tutta la storia della civiltà sembrava essersi aggirata intorno al bacino del Mediterraneo. Il Cristianesimo doveva essere la sola religione dell'umanità;—e Roma torreggiava nelle menti, per gli annali suoi meravigliosi, come il "caput mundi," predestinata al dominio delle genti e colle armi e colla religione.

**La stessa cattolicità della Chiesa, da**

tutti voluta, sembrava implicare la necessità di una corrispondente unità ed universalità nell' ordinamento supremo della potestà civile, a difesa della società laica contro gli eventuali eccessi e le usurpazioni di una teocrazia invadente.

L' uso quasi universale nei paesi civili del latino come lingua ufficiale dello Stato e della Chiesa e come lingua letteraria, accentuava la tendenza generale unitaria degli spiriti più colti.

I ricordi inoltre dei secoli dell' Impero dei Cesari, che rappresentavano una civiltà luminosa, i cui raggi rilucevano ancora a traverso le nebbie della barbarie medioevale, avvaloravano il concetto dell' unità dello Stato come condizione necessaria di pace, di ordine e di progresso.

La divisione politica all' incontro raffigurava allora di fatto uno stato quasi permanente di rapina, di turbolenze e di guerra, così interna come esterna. Ogni città era, entro la stessa cerchia delle sue mura, irta di torri, vere fortezze private di difesa ed offesa militare; Roma sola ne contava novecento. Ogni parte, ogni fazione che riuscisse a trionfare, sia col tradimento, sia con le armi, proprie o altrui, uccideva, bandiva gli avversari, ne confiscava i beni, ne disfaceva le case.

L' idea stessa di pace tra gli uomini si veniva così a identificare con l' idea imperialista, la quale non implicava alcun pensiero di predominio di razza e tanto

meno di sostituzione di razza,—come importa troppo spesso ora,—e neanche di conquista e di soggezione militare o di sfruttamento economico; ma significava invece unità di diritto fondamentale tra le genti, pacifica composizione delle discordie, alta giurisdizione arbitrale.

Ma ciò che il segno che parlar mi face  
 Fatto avea prima, e poi era fatturo  
 Per lo regno mortal, ch' a lui soggiace,

Diventa in apparenza poco e scuro,  
 Se in mano al terzo Cesare si mira  
 Con occhio chiaro e con affetto puro;

Chè la viva giustizia che mi spirra  
 Gli concedette, in mano a quel ch' io dico,  
 Gloria di far vendetta alla sua ira.

Or qui t' ammira in ciò ch' io ti replica :  
 Poscia con Tito a far vendetta corse  
 Della vendetta del peccato antico.

Dante dà grande importanza al fatto che all' Imperatore Romano, nella persona del suo rappresentante Poncio Pilato, fosse concesso il privilegio di soddisfare alla giustizia divina. Il sacrificio di Cristo per essere pena, o espiazione, o vendetta del peccato antico, doveva avvenire sotto la giurisdizione del giudice normale e ordinario dell' umanità.

Con ciò Dante immedesima la missione dell' Impero coi supremi destini del genere umano e con la redenzione dal peccato di Adamo, la quale schiuse all' uomo le porte del Paradiso.

Tito poi vendicherà l'ira divina sul popolo ebreo. Già leggemmo nel *Purgatorio*

.....Che il buon Tito con l'aiuto  
Del sommo Rege vendicò le fora  
Ond' uscì il sangue per Giuda venduto.

Per apprezzare al loro giusto valore tutte queste teoriche, occorre tenere sempre in mente quale grandissima parte assumeva, a quei tempi, la religione, con le sue dottrine, i suoi riti e le sue più minute pratiche, in tutta la vita privata e pubblica del cittadino; parte superiore assai a quella che non occupi generalmente ora in mezzo agli stessi ambienti più osservanti e pii.

Dante parla sempre della pena, anche considerata socialmente, come di "vendetta." Era questo il concetto biblico della giustizia punitiva. Nelle forme rudimentali della civiltà, anche la vendetta passionale assume di fatto una funzione sociale di prevenzione e di tutela. Dalla idea primitiva della vendetta, così individuale, come di famiglia o di gente, si sale a poco a poco nella storia dell'umanità al concetto più complesso della pena come retribuzione, sia divina sia sociale (la legge di contrappasso del medioevo), e come espiazione; e in ultimo alla teorica della difesa sociale, che considera ogni penalità soltanto come mezzo necessario di prevenzione dei reati, oltrechè come correzione del reo.

Il Tommaseo rileva a questo punto come un difetto la insistenza con cui, nel discorso

imperiale, si batte ripetutamente sull'*'io* di chi parla, e sul fatto stesso del parlare :

.....Il segno che *parlar mi face* ;  
 .....La viva giustizia che *mi spirà* ;  
 .....In mano a quel *ch' io dico*,  
 Or qui t' ammira in ciò *ch' io ti replica*.

Tale ripetizione però parmi voluta dal Poeta per accentuare il carattere personale della narrazione ; con che si rendono pure più naturali i bruschi trapassi da un argomento all' altro : dal discorso di sè alla storia dell' aquila ; dai partiti del tempo all' assetto del cielo di Mercurio, e da questo alle vicende di Romeo.

E quando il dente Longobardo morse  
 La Santa Chiesa, sotto alle sue ali  
 Carlo Magno vincendo, la soccorse.

Qui Giustiniano, rovesciando in certo modo la tesi guelfa, che dalla incoronazione di Carlomagno traeva argomento per far derivare ogni podestà imperiale dal Pontefice, fa invece quasi dipendere dall' assunzione delle insegne dell' Impero per parte del Re Franco la vittoria sua sui Longobardi e la salvezza della Chiesa.

La dimostrazione storica si arresta a Carlomagno, come al punto di congiunzione tra la legittimità del Sacro Impero e le tradizioni dell' antico Impero dei Cesari. Con la fusione del romano col germanico, col rinnovato e più stretto contatto del Papato con l' Impero, ambedue rappresentanti un principio di cattolicità e aspiranti al dominio universale, nasce un mondo nuovo.

Omai puoi giudicar di quei cotali  
 Ch' io accusai di sopra e dei lor falli  
 Che son cagion di tutti i vostri mali.

L' uno al pubblico segno i gigli gialli  
 Oppone, e l' altro appropria quello a parte,  
 Sì che forte a veder è chi più falli.

I Ghibellini e i Guelfi non erano i più quelli della prima metà del secolo decimoterzo, ai tempi delle lotte classiche tra l' Impero e il Papato per la signoria del mondo. Erano nomi che omai non significavano più, in realtà, che il confuso contendere di fazioni locali, e lotte tra famiglie per la supremazia nel comune; ciascuna parte cercando appoggi morali e materiali al di là delle mura cittadine, con l' invocare questi l' aquila imperiale, quelli i gigli di Francia, cui per odio dell' Impero si era strettamente associato il Papato.

All' ideale di uno stato nazionale italiano non pensava alcuno.

Dante sdegna ogni meschino obiettivo di partigianeria locale e intende farsi "parte per sè stesso." Egli non vuole schierarsi né per l' Impero contro il Papato, né per questo contro quello. Il suo sogno è, non la sovrapposizione dell' un potere all' altro, ma la loro reciproca indipendenza e ordinata cooperazione.

L' idea italiana si confondeva nell' animo suo con tutto il suo sistema di assetto politico e religioso dell' umanità; anzi ne formava il substrato.

L' Impero doveva avere lo stesso carattere duplice, di universalità e insieme di latinità, che aveva avuto fino allora la Chiesa : universalità di fini e di alta giurisdizione, egemonia privilegiata di Roma, e, per suo mezzo, del "giardin dell' Imperio," l' Italia.

E intanto Roma, la città santa, per l' abbandono di Cesare e la permanenza del Papa in Avignone, gli appariva allora, mentre egli scriveva, vedova e sola :

.....La pianta  
Ch' è or due volte dirubata quiui.

Il vivo movimento morale e intellettuale, economico e politico, che ferveva in Italia agli albori del Rinascimento, poteva porgere giustificato motivo a Dante di credere alla possibile ripresa dell' antica grandezza e del primato italico nel mondo civile. Solo, o massimo impedimento a ciò gli apparivano le discordie cittadine, fomentate specialmente dal guelfismo francese e papale.

La tesi imperialista di Dante è semplice nel suo ordito.

Condizione alla felicità umana è la pace universale. Soltanto con la pace il genere umano può conseguire il proprio fine ; e questo fine è la civiltà. A questa si giunge mediante la libertà, la giustizia, l' amore. Per ottenere questi postulati di civiltà e questa pace occorre una certa unità di organizzazione generale dello Stato.

L'umanità non può essere libera sotto ordinamenti in cui l'azione dei governanti è determinata da fini ed interessi ristretti.

"A queste guerre e alle lor cagioni torre via,"—egli ci dice nel *Convito*,—"conviene di necessità tutta la terra...essere Monarchia, cioè un solo Principato e uno Principe avere, il quale tutto possedendo e più desiderare non possendo, li re tenga contenti nelli termini dell'i regni, sicchè pace intra loro sia, nella quale si posino le cittadi, e in questa posa le vicinanze s' amino, in questo amore le case prendano ogni loro bisogno, il quale preso, l'uomo viva felicemente; ch'è quello per che l'uomo è nato."

Con ciò Dante non vuole sopprese le autonomie nazionali e locali. Sotto l'Imperatore tutore supremo della pace e della giustizia, possono sussistere i re e i governi particolari. "Imperocchè,"—egli dichiara,—"le nazioni, regni e città hanno tra loro certe proprietà per le quali bisogna con differenti leggi governarle."

Nessun ordinamento organico di Stato che andasse oltre i limiti di una sola città e del suo immediato territorio si poteva concepire in quei tempi con forma che non fosse di unione personale. Ogni città che, ordinata a repubblica, ne debellasse un'altra, la soggiogava, riducendola a servitù: così Firenze a Pistoia, a Lucca, a Pisa;—ma non si fondevano mai i due reggimenti in uno nuovo più largo con egualianza di

diritti politici e civili. Solo sotto il principe questo allargarsi del concetto di Stato diveniva possibile ; magari sotto un comune despotismo, come avvenne in Francia.

Dante ebbe, pel primo, chiaro il concetto moderno dello Stato, come condizione naturale e necessaria al conseguimento della giustizia e della civiltà ; ebbe netto il sentimento della necessaria egualianza e libertà degli elementi componenti lo Stato, perchè questo possa avere una vita d'insieme organica e progressiva. Nel Monarca egli vedeva il sommo moderatore, il ministro di tutti (*minister omnium*), il "rex propter gentem."

Nell'ordine storico e pratico il concetto della Monarchia universale si veniva a identificare nella sua mente con l'alto predominio del Sacro Impero Romano-Germanico, quale legittimo erede delle tradizioni dell'Impero dei Cesari.

La legittimità di tale eredità non veniva allora contestata da nessuno ; non dai Ghibellini, cointeressati nella causa imperiale ; non dai Guelfi, perchè dal Pontefice derivava l'incoronazione di Carlo magno.

Bryce dice che il libro *De Monarchia*, in cui Dante espone sistematicamente tutta la sua teorica imperialista, è riuscito un epitaffio, anzichè una profezia.

Accade spesso nelle cose umane, che si estolle, si teorizza e si riduce a sistema assoluto ciò che appunto sta per consu-

marsi e tramontare. Dante s'innamorò dell'ideale simmetrico della doppia potestà imperiale e papale, giusto quando, per la feroce lotta secolare tra loro, i due istituti si erano in gran parte reciprocamente fiaccati.

L'Impero aveva sotto gli Svevi data fuori più viva luce di sè, prima di esaurirsi. E durava ancora la memoria geniale dell'Impero germanico con veste spiccatamente italiana, quale si era presentato sotto Federigo II.

Arrigo VII fu l'ultimo imperatore che rispondesse all'ideale schiettamente ghibellino; come Bonifacio VIII fu l'ultimo pontefice che impersonasse il principio teocratico del medio evo.

*Incipit vita nova.*

Il movimento della civiltà procede a spirale e non a circoli chiusi. Dante sognò un ritorno al passato, che non era possibile; —ma con la stessa sua idealizzazione del passato spargeva i germi di un avvenire, da lui non travisto nella sua forma reale, bensì nello spirito suo di cosmopolitismo, di tendenza alla pace, alla libertà, alla tolleranza.

Sognando un'Italia romanamente imperiale fu artefice poderoso di una Italia nazionale, intensificandone la coscienza morale e politica, e dando unità e dignità alla sua lingua.

Gli angusti confini del mondo medioevale sono da lungo tempo scomparsi; la civiltà, seguendo "il corso del ciel," ha traversato

gli oceani ; prima l' America, poi l' Australia, e oggi, a passo di carica, il Giappone, sono entrati, con le loro forze giovani e balde, nel movimento del progresso mondiale ; tra poco forse vedremo pure corrervi i popoli dell' India e dell' Africa "dai quai prima uscìo." Dei sogni di Impero universale non vi è più traccia ;—ma rimane sempre più viva in ogni cuore ben nato l' aspirazione del poeta (da raggiungersi bensì per altre vie che non quelle da lui vagheggiate), di una umanità più strettamente unita nel comune amore e per la comune difesa dei principii di giustizia e di libertà, pur rispettando insieme ogni maggiore sviluppo delle autonomie nazionali e locali.

Dante, che non ammetteva esservi stati dopo Federigo II, "l' ultima possanza," altri Imperatori, non essendo i successori stati incoronati a Roma, ebbe per un tempo la dolce speranza di vedere attuato il suo grande sogno politico, dopo la elezione di Arrigo di Lussemburgo, avvenuta nel Novembre 1308. Tale elezione era stata pure favorita, in opposizione alla candidatura di Carlo di Valois, dal papa Clemente V per diffidenza della soverchiante ambizione della Casa di Francia.

Bella e cavalleresca figura quella dell' alto Arrigo !

Il Cardinale da Prato la descrive al Papa come "il miglior uomo della Magna

e il più leale e il più franco"; e Sennuccio del Bene così lo commemora :—

Largo, prudente, temperato e forte,  
Giusto più ch' uom che mai venisse a morte.

Sceso in Lombardia nel 1310 il nuovo Imperatore si trova subito attraversata la via da innumerevoli difficoltà e tradimenti, per opera così degli amici come degli avversari.

Dante lo sprona a proseguire animoso nell'impresa di "drizzare Italia" e a scendere in Toscana e in Roma. "Sostarono al postutto"—così gli scrive—"i lunghi sospiri e venner meno le lagrime, e come desideratissimo sole che sorge, nuova speranza di miglior secolo a Italia rifulse....."

E di quale ineffabile gioia deve aver esultato l'animo del povero esule al veder finalmente Cesare entrare nella sua Roma, e cingere la corona imperiale in Laterano, il 29 giugno 1312!

Il bando di Arrigo VII, dopo l'incoronazione, ai signori della Cristianità suona come un compendio del libro *De Monarchia*.

Arrigo sognava di quetare le discordie cittadine, di dar pace all'Italia, decidendo come arbitro tra Ghibellini e Guelfi, e non sposando la causa particolare di alcuno. Dino Compagni narra: "I Ghibellini diceano: e' non vuol veder se non Guelfi; e i Guelfi diceano: e' non accoglie se non Ghibellini; e così temeano l'un l'altro."

E Giustiniano qui ammonisce :

Faccian li Ghibellin, faccian lor arte  
 Sott' altro segno ; chè mal segue quello  
 Sempre chi la giustizia e lui diparte :

Ma breve fu la gioia !

Mentre Firenze resisteva vittoriosa agli assalti delle milizie imperiali, e il papa Clemente lavorava coverto a moltiplicare le insidie e le divisioni intorno ad Arrigo, questi ad un tratto cade infermo a Buonconvento presso Siena, e dopo brevissima malattia muore il 24 agosto 1313. La voce popolare lo dice avvelenato mediante l'ostia consacrata.

La sua salma viene trasportata nel 1315 a Pisa ghibellina. Sul sarcofago, che oggi si trova nel Camposanto, si vede scolpita un'aquila che tiene tra gli artigli la scritta :

*Quidquid facimus venit ex alto*

Kraus, Lowell ed altri ritengono che essa possa essere stata dettata da Dante.

Il mondo Ghibellino all'improvviso annuncio della catastrofe restò come sbigottito dallo sgomento e dal dolore.

Dettero voce al loro pianto Cino da Pistoia, Sennuccio del Bene ed altri poeti del tempo.

Dante tace.

È svanito il bel sogno di vedere, coi suoi occhi, curate le piaghe d'Italia, di vedervi ricondotte la pace e la giustizia per opera di Cesare !

La volontà di Dio, chiaramente indicata da duemila anni di storia, non potrà non effettuarsi un giorno :

Non sarà tutto tempo senza reda

L'aquila.....

.....L'alta providenza che con Scipio  
Difese a Roma la gloria del mondo  
Soccorrà tosto.....

Tutto questo porterà il futuro ; egli ne ha sicura fede.

Ma, intanto, per lui, ogni speranza di ritorno nella sua terra è completamente perduta. Il suo nome è stato ripetuto in un nuovo bando di perpetuo esilio emanato nel settembre 1311 ; e quattro anni dopo, Ranieri di Zaccaria, Vicario del Re Roberto in Firenze, rinnova contro di lui, designandolo come Ghibellino, la sentenza di morte.

Dopo aver rimproverato ai Ghibellini il loro gretto spirito di parte, Giustiniano si volge ai Guelfi e al loro maggiore rappresentante in Italia, Carlo II d'Angiò, l'odiato Ciotto di Gerusalemme :

E non l'abbatta esto Carlo novello

Coi Guelfi suoi, ma tema degli artigli  
Ch'a più alto leon trasser lo vello.

Appare qui invertita l'allegoria del crudele epitaffio che, a detta dello storico quattrocentista Collenuccio, Carlo I d'Angiò avrebbe fatto incidere sulla tomba di Corradino nella chiesa ora distrutta di Santa Croce in Napoli ; là il leone strappa le penne e il capo all'aquilotto. Senonchè

recenti studi fan ritenere che quella iscrizione sia una pretta creazione dello stesso Collenuccio, il quale probabilmente ne trasse il concetto e le immagini appunto da questi versi di Dante.

Molte fiate già pianser li figli  
Per la colpa del padre, e non si creda  
Che Dio trasmuti l'armi per suoi gigli.

Pur troppo quei gigli dominarono ancora per secoli in tanta parte del bel paese; fino al giorno che Dio pietoso, volendo rendere l'Italia agl'Italiani, dette loro per unica arme la bianca croce in campo rosso, simbolo di redenzione da ogni servitù, esterna ed interna.

A questo punto, quasi per un movimento di sdegno o di dolore, muta a un tratto la nota del discorso imperiale. Nel Canto sesto del *Purgatorio*, che per tanti riguardi ricorda questo, abbiamo pure una simile brusca transizione, quando, dopo la desolante descrizione delle condizioni in cui versa ogni parte d'Italia, il Poeta si volge con amara ironia alla sua città:

Fiorenza mia, ben puoi esser contenta  
Di questa digression che non ti tocca.

Ma da quando fu scritto quel Canto sono trascorsi altri anni dolorosi, e l'orizzonte si è sempre più oscurato da ogni parte. - L'in-  
vettiva, il sarcasmo implicano pure l'energia che danno la speranza della riscossa o la brama della vendetta. Oramai per troppo lungo soffrire Dante ha perduta quasi la

forza di odiare. Non più accenti d'ira contro i suoi persecutori! Solo lo spettacolo della tristitia dei moderni pastori della Chiesa potrà ancora valere a farne divampare lo sdegno.

Giustiniano abbandona in tronco il tema politico, e, per rispondere alla seconda domanda che gli avea rivolta Dante, gli descrive il cielo di Mercurio :

Questa picciola stella si correda  
Dei buoni spiriti, che son stati attivi  
Perchè onore e fama li succeda ;  
  
E quando li disiri poggian quivi  
Sì disviando, pur convien che i raggi  
Del vero amore in su poggin men vivi.

Siamo proprio nel cielo che riserva a sè stesso il Poeta. Già al suo primo apparire —ve lo ricordate—le anime luminose che vi si riflettono lo hanno accolto giubilanti, con le parole :

Ecco chi crescerà li nostri amori !

Egli non ci ha mai nascosto quale potente stimolo all'attività gli viene dal gran disio di farsi eccellente, per acquistar

.....Vita fra coloro  
Che questo tempo chiameranno antico.

“Ed è concetto originale,”—osserva il Tommaseo,—“e di tanto più bella moralità quant'è un'umile condanna della sua propria sete d'onore, il porre più basso, accanto agli spiriti di volere debole e che

non fecero il bene, quelli che lo fecero per amore di fama."

Ma nel commensurar de' nostri gaggi  
 Col merto, è parte di nostra letizia,  
 Perchè non li vedem minor nè maggi.

Quinci addolcisce la viva giustizia  
 In noi l'affetto sì, che non si puote  
 Torcer giammai ad alcuna nequizia.

Ci troviamo trasportati in un mondo ideale, il regno della pace e della giustizia, dove tacciono le male passioni.

Mentre in terra

Superbia, invidia ed avarizia sono  
 Le tre faville che hanno i cori accesi,

lassù ad ogni merito corrisponde il suo premio, e di questa perfetta corrispondenza tutti sono persuasi e tutti sono contenti, perchè nessuno presume troppo di sè, nessuno si fa infelice del godimento altrui, nessuno aspira a più di quanto sente di meritare.

Quella serena letizia nel conformarsi al divino volere, che nelle anime del primo regno del Paradiso vedemmo dettata da sola virtù di carità, agli spiriti più forti che rilucono nel secondo cielo deriva anzitutto da un intimo abito di giustizia ; abito che a sua volta (ce lo dice lo stesso Dante nel *De Monarchia*) dal sentimento di carità ritrae ognora finezza e luce e vigore.

Diverse voci fan giù dolci note ;  
 Così diversi scanni in nostra vita,  
 Rendon dolce armonia tra queste rote.

Dall'accordo degli animi nel cielo di Mercurio si passa, per una naturale transizione, alla armonia musicale pervadente gli spazi cosmici. È la grande sinfonia delle sfere celesti, sulla quale modulano i loro canti i cori degli Angeli,

.....Quei che notan sempre

Retro alle note degli eterni giri.

Ed entro la presente margarita  
Luce la luce di Romeo, di cui  
Fu l' opra bella e grande mal gradita.

Ma i Provenzali che fer contra lui  
Non hanno riso, e però mal cammina  
Qual si fa danno del ben fare altrui.

Quattro figlie ebbe, e ciascuna regina,  
Ramondo Berlinghieri, e ciò gli fece  
Romeo, persona umile e peregrina ;

E poi il mosser le parole biece  
A domandar ragione a questo giusto,  
Che gli assegnò sette e cinque per diece.

Indi partissi povero e vetusto ;  
E se il mondo sapesse il cor ch' egli ebbe  
Mendicando sua vita a frusto a frusto,

Assai lo loda, e più lo loderebbe.

Dai freddi sereni dove si libra l'aquila  
o dove alleluiano gli angeli siamo tornati in  
un ambiente più umano. Ma con la nota  
umana rivive il mondo della ingiustizia e  
del dolore.

Chi fu Romeo ? E perchè mai è posto  
tra coloro che furono attivi per desiderio  
di fama ?

Alla corte del Berlinghieri Conte di  
Provenza vi fu un Gran Siniscalco, di nome

Romieu De Villeneuve ; ma questi sopravvisse di cinque anni al suo signore, rimanendo incaricato del governo dello Stato come tutore della quarta figlia Beatrice, la quale solo dopo la morte del padre sposò Carlo D'Angiò, che tolse ai Provenzali il riso.

Ma a noi poco preme delle minuzie storiche del fatto stesso.

Quello che veramente ci interessa e ci commuove in tutto questo racconto è che il personaggio dal nome alquanto generico di Romeo, che significa pure pellegrino, sembra star qui nel secondo cielo più, direi, per tenere il posto a Dante, che per conto proprio.

Romeo qui è Dante, esule e calunniato, che peregrino va mendicando sua vita a frusto a frusto per ogni plaga d'Italia ; e i Provenzali che si fan danno del ben fare altrui, somigliano singolarmente a quell' ingrato popolo maligno, che

Ti si farà, per tuo ben far, nimico.

E prendono una particolare significazione le parole del Poeta a proposito di Romeo, quando poniamo mente al rigore con cui lo abbiamo veduto nell' Inferno giudicare un altro giusto, Pier della Vigna, che esso pure non ruppe fede al suo signore.

La storia di Pier della Vigna somiglia per molti versi a questa di Romeo, salvo nella mancanza, in lui, di fortezza d'animo

di fronte alla calunnia e alla disgrazia.  
Ricordiamo la sua confessione :

L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto,  
Credendo col morir fuggir disdegno,  
Ingusto fece me contra me giusto.

In questo diverso sentire del Poeta di fronte alle due vittime, egualmente innocenti, dell'invidia, benchè tanta pietà l'accori anche per le sventure del Canceliere capuano, si rivela tutta la profonda moralità di questo episodio di Romeo, direi quasi l'intima moralità dell'intero poema, pensato e scritto in mezzo alle ansie e ai dolori della povertà e dell'esilio.

Soffrire senza abbandonarsi, soffrire ogni ingiustizia degli uomini e conservare sempre intatti i propri ideali, e seguitare a tendervi con l'opera instancabile : ecco l'alto insegnamento morale che raggia da ogni pietra di questo titanico edificio.

Il mondo non saprà mai quale triste ciclo di passionato dolore si è svolto in quell'animo durante i vent'anni dell'iniquo bando.

Dante ci parla sempre poco delle proprie sofferenze :

*Le silence seul est grand, tout le reste est faiblesse,*

canta il poeta d'oltr'Alpe. In tutta la *Commedia* abbiamo, in proposito, appena le tre terzine dove Cacciaguida, predicendogli

l'esilio, gliene accenna i successivi patimenti:

Tu lascerai ogni cosa diletta  
Più caramente.....

con quel che segue. Solo nel *Convito* assistiamo ad un momento di abbandono, in cui ci si rivela, come landa oscura nel bagliore di un lampo, il lungo strazio di quell'anima grande e altera. Non conosco nella nostra letteratura squarcio più commovente di questo, nella sua semplice sincerità, e a rischio di oltrepassare l'ora e di sforzare ogni fren dell'arte, non reggo alla tentazione di rileggervelo:

“Poichè fu piacere de' cittadini della bellissima e famosissima figlia di Roma, Fiorenza, di gettarmi fuori del suo dolcissimo seno (nel quale nato e nudrito fui fino al colmo della mia vita, e nel quale, con buona pace di quelli, desidero con tutto il cuore di riposare l' animo stanco, e terminare il tempo che mi è dato), per le parti quasi tutte, alle quali questa lingua si stende, peregrino, quasi mendicando, sono andato, mostrando contro a mia voglia la piaga della fortuna, che suole ingiustamente al piagato molte volte essere imputata. Veramente io sono stato legno senza vela e senza governo, portato a diversi porti e foci e liti dal vento secco che vapora la dolorosa povertà. E sono vile apparito agli occhi a molti, che forse per alcuna fama in altra forma mi aveano immaginato, nel cospetto de' quali non solamente mia persona invilio,

ma di minor pregio si fece ogni opera, sì già fatta, come quella che fosse a fare."

L'unico sogno che omai gli rimane è che la gloria, che gli potrà derivare dal poema sacro compiuto, vinca un giorno la crudeltà che lo serra fuori della sua Fiorenza :

Io non posso fuggir, ch'ella non vegna  
Nell'immagine mia,

suona il suo lamento.

Ed egli si dà tutto nell' alto lavoro per cui s'infuturerà la sua vita.

Francesco D'Ovidio, in uno dei geniali suoi studi sulla *Divina Commedia*, paragona il poema ad una luminaria di cui miriamo lo spettacolo a lumi in parte già spenti. Molte illusioni alle persone ed ai fatti del giorno hanno perduto il loro sapore ; molti modi di sentire e di pensare cui vi si fa appello sono svaniti per sempre. Il poema fermeva di tutta la vita del tempo ; riboccava di idee, di suggestioni, di impulsi che oggi in parte tacciono, inerti e freddi, e che talvolta non riusciamo nemmeno più ad avvertire.

Tutto questo è vero ; ma è altresì vero che questo grandioso monumento, che sembra contenere in sè l'anima di tutto un millennio di vita dell'umanità, ci presenta col volgere degli anni e dei secoli, sempre nuovi aspetti, s'illumina di nuove luci, parla con nuove voci alle generazioni che si succedono.

E dietro di esso si erge, sempre più viva

e distinta, dinanzi a noi, la personalità dell' Autore, così alta e insieme così umana.

"Il suo nome"—diceva il Boccaccio—"per essere stropicciato dal tempo, sempre diventerà più lucente." Esso risplende nella storia d' Italia, nei giorni avversi come nei prospiri, quale un faro luminoso, stimolo alla virtù operosa, alla disciplina di sè, alla fede nel bene, allo illimitato amore per la patria.

Al di sopra dei partiti, vecchi o nuovi, ciascuno dei quali vorrebbe invano appropriarselo, al di sopra delle particolari credenze ed opinioni, egli vola come aquila, personificando quanto vi è di più leale e diritto, di più squisitamente morale nell'anima di nostra gente. Ecco la ragione vera ed intima del grande ed arcano impero che ogni sua parola esercita su di noi.

Ed al sentimento, che proviamo tutti, di intensa gratitudine verso chi ha arricchito di tanta vera e purissima gloria il nome d' Italia, verso chi è stato così efficiente strumento del risorgimento nazionale e ci ha dati, a tutti noi, tanti elementi di godimento dello spirito e di maggior dignità della vita, si mescola pure, se ben scrutiamo il fondo del nostro cuore, un senso come di rimorso, quasi un desiderio di espiazione, per quella parte di comune responsabilità che pur ricade sui figli per le colpe dei padri, dell' ingiusto e crudele trattamento

che il più grande degl' Italiani ebbe a soffrire di mano dei suoi concittadini.

“Non vi è morale più commovente di questa”—esclama il poeta Lowell,—“che il riconoscimento, per parte dei suoi contemporanei, di una natura così straordinariamente dotata e così degna, si debba riassumere nel bando di Firenze; *Igne comburatur sic quod moriatur*: sia arso col fuoco, così che muoia.”

Questa morale non s' indirizza a voi, gentili signore, che della cosa pubblica non vi occupate, ma volge il taglio a noi, uomini politici, traducendosi, per tutti i tempi, in un solenne ammonimento di tolleranza e di carità.





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